# PICKLETILLIE FOLK

IAN FARQUHAR

241

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## HUMOURS OF A SCOTTISH VILLAGE

BY
IAN FARQUHAR

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TO THE

READERS

OF THE

"PEOPLE'S FRIEND"

WHO HAVE GIVEN SUCH A HEARTY WELCOME TO
THESE SKETCHES DURING THE PAST FEW YEARS

Profits of this Book will go to the *People's Friend*
Love Darg for Sick Children's Hospitals

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# PICKLETILLIE FOLK

## I

## PICKLETILLIE NEWS

"ANITHER year gane to join the shadowy legions o' the past, John," remarked Mr Peterkin, waxing poetical now that the rush of a very busy New Year season was over. "An' noo we're writin' nineteen twenty-five, us that minds o' echteen an' et-cettry—hooch, ay."

"Ay, Matthew, we're gettin' on," returned Posty, not without a sigh, "but, hoots, we're wearin' weel. What if oor pows is no' quite sae close thackit as of auld an' oor waist measurement is bigger. That's a guid sign. It shows that we're like oor meat, an' thrivin' on't. We're younger in some ways—quite callants, in fact."

"Ay, that's hoo to look auld Faither Time in the face, John. It's what they ca' otty-suggestion. Tell yersel' that every day in every way ye're growin' younger an' younger, an' syne ye'll be wearin' knickerbockers again an' trottin' off to the schule."

The entry of Mrs Thomson, the blacksmith's wife, and Mrs Ramsay, the shoemaker's better half, for their week-end groceries interrupted the discussion, and John Malcolm leant against Peterkin's drapery counter beneath an artless display of frilled undergarments suspended on a string, and smoked meditatively.

"Ony news the nicht, ladies?" asked Peterkin, sharpening his ham knife. "Everybody behavin' theirsel's an' nae untoward events happenin'?"

"Naething ever happens here, Matthew," answered the shoemaker's wife, who had been a great gossip in her day, but whose tongue had been curbed by new responsibilities. "We gang oor ways doucely an' quietly frae New Year to New Year, an' never stray frae the strecht road."

"Happy's the place that has nae history," quoted Peterkin. "We dinna want to be in the public gaze like some folk, do we?" The allusion was to a recent scandal in the neighbouring and rival parish of Balneuchar, where the village shopkeeper had just been caught giving short-weight.

When the two goodwives had been supplied with tea, sugar, butter, ham, oatmeal, and smoked fish—"just new in frae Aberdeen wi' the tang o' the sea still aboot them," said the grocer—and had departed, little Johnnie Peterkin came in with the weekly paper in his hand.

"Ah, ye've got the latest budget o' local information, Johnnie," said his father. "Turn to the Pickletillie news an' read oot the various items, an' let's see hoo grand ye're gettin' on wi' yer readin'."

"It'll be piper's news to us," said Posty. "We ken it a' already."

"That's so," agreed Peterkin. "You an' me gleans the field gey bare, John. You gether up a' the news in yer perambulations up an' doon the pairish, an' onything you miss blaws in to me here. But read the paragraphs, Johnnie. There'll maybe be something we dinna ken."

So Johnnie perched himself on the rim of a barrel of fragrant Canadian apples, with one or two of which he hoped to be rewarded for his elocutionary efforts, and began—

"LARGE PIG.—A very large pig belonging to and reared by Mr Andrew Thomson, blacksmith, Pickletillie, was killed on Monday. The animal, which was in first-class condition, turned the scales at twenty stone."

"That's a lee," said Posty. "There never was a soo that size in this pairish."

"Let's ca' it an exaggeration," said Peterkin charitably. "Every man thinks his ain soo the biggest an' finest an' fattest, John, an', forby, it redounds to the honour an' glory o' Pickletillie. Next item, Johnnie."

"NEW YEAR TREAT.—Mr Matthew Peterkin, the leading business man in Pickletillie parish, so well known for his enterprise, public spirit, and interest in all good causes, presided over a large gathering at the school last Friday evening. The occasion was the annual New Year treat to the children and grown-ups of the parish. Mr Peterkin delivered a racy and original address, in which he spoke of the permanent nature of Pickletillie's institutions, and said changes were very uncommon in their midst. Steady, settled, well-being, and well-doing were the characteristics of the place. Changes which commended themselves to a certain class of people were foreign to the nature of Pickletillie. Tea was served in splendid style by Messrs Peter Tosh & Son, whose scones and cookies are famous in the district, and with songs and recitations a very

enjoyable time was spent. The evening finished up with a dance, in which old and young tripped the light fantastic with extreme energy."

"They micht hae said the mornin' finished up," commented Posty. "It was four o'clock when I heard the last o' them gaun hame."

"No rest till morn when youth and beauty meet, ye ken, John," said Peterkin. "Forby, I was there mysel' till efter midnicht, an' I danced the echtsome wi' the youngest o' them. Ech, me—the days we've seen!"

"Motoring Mishap (read on Johnnie).—A hen belonging to Mrs Porteous, Gullyburn, was run over by a passing motor on Tuesday. The unfortunate animal had lingered on the road to pick up some corn dropped by a passing cart, when the relentless Juggernaut swooped down upon her. We understand that adequate compensation has been paid."

"If that's a' the news, Johnnie," said his father, "ye can stop."

"There's jist anither paragraph," said Johnnie, and in level, unimpressive tones, as though he had been announcing the most ordinary event, and not something calculated to shake the parish like an earthquake from end to end, he read—

"We understand that the Rev. Dr Gillies, minister of Pickletillie parish, has received and accepted a call to St Nathaniel's Parish Church, Edinburgh."

Peterkin, suddenly springing into an upright position, swept out his arm and overturned a box of

kippers on the floor. Posty gaped so that his pipe fell out of his mouth, and he barely saved it from disaster by making a hasty grab at it with both hands. The two looked at each other in amazement.

" Are ye sure ye're no' makin' that up, Johnnie? " demanded his father sternly.

" There it's. Ye can read it for yersel'," said the boy, and Peterkin, with Posty looking over his shoulder, read the announcement slowly. There was no doubt about it.

" An' us sayin' changes never come in Pickletillie," groaned Peterkin.

" Will I take an apple, father? " asked Johnnie.

" An' us tellin' each ither we kent a'thing that was gaun on," said Posty bitterly.

" All right, dad, I'll take—three, did you say? " His father had not said anything about it, being incapable of descending to such details at the moment, so Johnnie, reasoning that silence gives consent, hastily filled his pockets and vanished.

" John," said Peterkin in a chastened voice, very unlike his usual confident accents, " we're catched napping this time. We've haen the blinkers drawn owre oor een. Fancy a' this gaun on an' us never to hear hint nor hair o't ony mair than if he'd gotten a ca' to a kirk in the moon."

Posty nodded, shook his head, and nodded again.

" Ay, Matthew, ye see it'll a' hae been engineered in Edinburgh. It'll be Hersel' that's dune it. Her folk are weel up in the capital city. They'll hae influence."

" She's never likit Pickletillie," said Peterkin. It was, of course, the minister's wife they were discuss-

ing. "I daursay she's aye been wantin' back to Edinburgh. He wad preach yon sermon to them on the Garden o' Nuts, fu' o' nice bits aboot nature, ye ken. Yon's a whopper. Yon wad catch them. But wait till they hear it for the tenth time, to say naething o' Balaam's Ass and Jonah's Gourd. They'll be wishin' they had left him to feenish his career in Pickletillie."

The good man, it will be seen, spoke somewhat bitterly, and, in truth—ruling elder, Session-Clerk, chief pillar of the kirk, and leading man in the parish—he was entitled to think that the minister should not have left him to get this information from the columns of the *St Mertouns Gazette, Craigport Journal, and Pickletillie News.*

While the two were still looking askance at each other, David Ramsay, the shoemaker, and precentor in the church, rushed in.

"Hae ye heard?" he cried. "Gosh, isn't this jist michty?"

Peterkin regarded the excited little man calmly.

"Are you referrin' by any chance to the call to the Rev. Dr Gillies frae St Nathaniel's Church, Edinburgh?" he asked in level tones, calculated to quell any emotional disturbance.

"Imphm!" ejaculated the shoemaker. "What else?"

"In the absence of any corryborryation we presume the report is correct," said Peterkin.

"Dae ye think it'll maybe no' be true?" asked David Ramsay, his exuberance much checked.

"Oh, it'll be true enough," said Posty. "I heard a guid while back that he wanted awa' frae Pickletillie."

"Or, rather, that SHE wanted awa'," corrected Peterkin.

"Jist that," said the precentor, who had been a much-henpecked man in his day.

At this point John Nicholson, the minister's man, appeared, wearing the air of one who is weighed down with many valuable secrets.

"Well?" he said expressively.

"Well?" replied Peterkin, and Posty and the precentor looked at him expectantly.

"Ye'll be surprised, nae doot," said the beadle, producing his snuffbox.

"We are," admitted Peterkin. "You kirk offeeshials seem to keep things michty quiet."

"We ken hoo to haud oor tongues, Matthew—an important qualification in this gossip-lovin' warld. Ye see, when he preached in St Nathaniel's three months syne an' took nae fewer nor six o' his best sermons wi' him—Manse Jess telt me that—I kind o' smelt a rat, an' when it was announced that the minister o' St Nathaniel's was retirin' I smelt it a wee thingie stronger. They had had it a' cut an' dried in advance. It's echt hunder a year an' a manse," added the beadle with the air of one who has access to inside information, though he had just got these details from a dusty copy of the *Church Year Book* lying in the vestry.

After that Andrew Thomson, the blacksmith; Alec Donn, the saddler; Miss M'Tavish, Pickletillie's greatest gossip, and others looked in at Mr Peterkin's to discuss the astounding news. They wondered if he could give them any more details, but soon discovered that he had been taken by surprise as much as any of themselves.

"It'll be a big steepen', nae doot," said the blacksmith.

"Echt hunder a year an' a manse," once more announced the beadle.

"So ye ken a' aboot it, John?" remarked the smith.

The beadle smiled a wise smile.

"Some o' us ken mair nor we tell to the kirk steeple," he remarked enigmatically.

"Is he gaun to leave sune?"

"Very sune, I expect," replied the beadle.

"We'll hae to get a smert young man," said the saddler, "ane that'll bring the kirk up to modern ideas and requirements. Things are awfu' far ahint doonby."

"Oh, indeed!" said the beadle drily. "In what respeck, may I enquire?"

"I wasna referrin' to your department, John," said the saddler hastily. "Naebody could bring in the books wi' mair expression an' effect, an' the kirk is beautifully kept—no' a speck o' dust to be seen." Here he winked to the smith behind the beadle's back. "But there's nae denying the preachin's far ahint the times, an' the organisation leaves much to be desired."

"Ye'll be wantin' mothers' meetings, I suppose, an' church workers' societies, an' sewin' for the heathen, an' a' that kind o' thing," said the beadle.

"I think the minister has deteriorated ever since he got married," declared Miss M'Tavish, who was understood to have had designs on the excellent man herself.

"Aweel," said Peterkin, intervening in a discussion that was growing inconveniently personal, "I admit

Posty an' me was fair dumbfoonert when we got the news."

"Quite flabbertigasted," added Malcolm. "It means a stoopendious change in this pairish efter thirty-five years o' a'e minister."

"We'll easily get a better man," said Miss M'Tavish spitefully.

"An' as easy get a waur," said Mr Peterkin.

"H'm!" This from the saddler. "He's had a grand, easy time in Pickletillie. He'll be nane the waur o' a city kirk to mak' him steer himsel' a hantle mair. Laziness grows on meenisters like moss on a stane."

"Ahem!"

Everybody started. There was a cough at the door, and a footstep, and the minister himself entered.

The beadle slunk behind a lady's waterproof hanging from a hook by Peterkin's drapery counter, and hoped he would not be seen; the saddler turned somewhat red, and the others looked uncomfortable, except Peterkin, who leant over the counter welcomingly.

"Ah—er—ahem! My good friends," said the reverend gentleman in his roundest tones, "I just looked in to give Mr Peterkin the news, which, I understand, has leaked out somewhat prematurely in the public press. I may say, however, that it is quite correct, and, feeling that the time has come for me to betake myself to a wider field of usefulness, I mean to accept the call, though, needless to say, I shall leave this place with the utmost regret."

"That feeling will be mutual, sir," said Peterkin. "We're sorry to lose ye, an' we wish ye weel."

"Thank you, Mr Peterkin. This life of ours is full of changes. Here we have no continuing city—and —er—good-night to you all."

When he had gone the folk looked relieved, and the beadle reappeared, trying to seem as though he had not been hiding at all.

"Friends," said Peterkin, waving his hand after the disappearing minister, "there'll hae to be a fare-well present—and a richt handsome one, too!"

"I shall not subscribe a penny to it," said Miss M'Tavish, walking out indignantly. The doctor had taken no notice of her. "I think we had much better keep our money to provide a present for the new minister."

The presentation was duly got up, however, and it proved a very handsome one, as Peterkin had said it would have to be, for Pickletillie always did such things generously. And, besides, the people were really sorry to part with "the doctor."

## II

## THE PICKLETILLIE VACANCY

"Now to the grand inquest, John," remarked Mr Peterkin to his favourite crony as they faced each other one spring evening in Peterkin's cosy parlour above the shop. "Dod, I'm thinking the Spanish Inqueesition was naething to this. Here's you an' me cheek by jowl here sittin' on the character an' deciding the destiny o' the maist eminent, eloquent, an' efficient ministers in Scotland—by their freends' account that is."

The other inquisitor lit his pipe.

"Hoo mony applications is there, Matthew?" he asked.

"One hunder an' twenty-seeven, John. It's maist michty. It speaks volumes for the importance and attractiveness o' the parish o' Pickletillie."

"Six hunder a year an' a manse an' glebe," said Posty. "Quite a tempting bait. Nae wonder there's sae mony fish nibblin' at it."

"Jist that. Weel, noo, to examine the catch an' separate the minnows frae the whales."

Before them was a table on which stood a shaded paraffin lamp, whose rays fell on a vast quantity of papers all neatly tied in bunches, and lying scattered like sheaves on a harvest field, awaiting the reapers in the persons of Peterkin and Posty.

Each little parcel of papers bore the inscription, "Testimonials in favour of the Rev. —— ——, Candidate for the Vacancy in the parish of Pickletillie." On behalf of the Vacancy Committee these two were trying to separate the wheat from the chaff, to discriminate between the sound cleric and the mere sounding brass, so that ultimately a short leet might be found to be submitted to the parishioners.

"Ah, hae—let's see." Peterkin flourished his hands over the table and took up a batch at random. "Here's the Reverend Mr Byegane, minister of Drumlie. 'After labouring for thirty-three years in the parish of Drumlie I wish to seek a wider sphere of usefulness.' Listen to that, John. We're the 'wider sphere.' 'In seeking for another corner of the vineyard——'"

"Corner o' the kirkyaird?" asked John innocently.

"No. Vineyard. 'I bring to the work the fruits of ripe experience garnered here.' Ay, jist that. It means that, havin' exhausted himsel' on the people o' Drumlie, he wants to coup his barrel of auld sermons on to us. I think we'll leave him to Drumlie. What say ye, John?"

Posty nodded and shoved the tobacco down in his pipe.

"He wad be comin' here for a rest," he observed, "an' it's no' a restin' but an arrestin' minister we want. Carry on, Matthew."

So Mr Byegane was put among the goats on the left hand, and Peterkin took up another application.

"The Rev. Mr Younger, born 1900, took travelling scholarship, studied on the Continent, and—ett settry.

Ay, imphm! This callant is a wee thingie ower new-fledged for Pickletillie. He wad be the better o' twa-three year in a city kirk wi' a guid-gangin' slum district attached. That wad tak' the cheep ooten the new shoon, I'm thinkin'."

"It's no' a bairn we want," said Posty. "Better let the laddie mature a wee. He'll aye be ripenin'. Next, Matthew."

"The Rev. Mr Highbrow, M.A., B.D., Ph.D., F.R.S.E., F.S.A.Scot. Guid be upon us! Is there ony o' the alphabet he doesna hae trailin' efter his name? He maun be a dungeon o' learnin'. He should be a professor, an' no' jist a common, five-echths parish minister."

"I see he's written a book in twa volumes on 'The Origin o' the Hittites'—a nice, inspirin' kind o' subject," said Posty. "He wad be thinkin' to hae plenty time here for howkin' among the dusty records o' the past. I vote we leave him to the Hittites."

"Agreed," said Peterkin, tossing the learned gentleman's testimonials aside, heedless that they bore the imprimatur of some of the leading Hebrew scholars in the country. "Weel, noo, what think ye o' the Rev. Mr Bountiful, wha is blessed wi' a fine wife an' ten bairns?"

"A regular Sunday schule," said Posty. "On wet days they wad mak' near a congregation themsels. Maister Bountiful will never weary for company onyway."

"I dinna fancy them runnin' wild ower oor nice manse," said Peterkin, "so I think we shouldna consider Mr Bountiful and his tribe."

"Awa' wi' them," cried Posty. "Shoo!"

"Then here's a fine gentleman for ye, John—the Rev. Percy Popjohn, D.D., F.B.S.L., M.U.G., pastor of the United Original Free Eccentrics: educated at Bermondsey College, London; degree of D.D. from the Martha Jenkins University, Iowa, U.S.A.; has no objection to becoming a Presbyterian, as he considers forms of Church government immaterial."

Peterkin arched his eyebrows, and Posty merely waved his pipe, indicating that the Rev. Percy might go to—Coventry, or Bermondsey, or anywhere else; it didn't matter.

Next Peterkin took up a large bunch printed in handsome type on hand-made paper.

"Noo we come to the Rev. Everard Willoughby, M.A.Oxon.," he announced in impressive tones.

"Eh?"

"O X O N," spelt Peterkin. "Will that be a kind o' superior extract o' beef M.A., think ye? He's married to the Hon. Emily something or other. Some style for ye, John."

"Imphm! I ken that sort. He'll wear ane o' thae waistcoats that button up the back, an' a jam-pot collar three inches high, an' a flat minister's hat like a broth plate, an' he'll refer to us as 'his good people.' Pickletillie wadna stand it, Matthew."

Peterkin thought so, too, so without compunction they shovelled the Rev. Everard Willoughby, M.A.Oxon., on the scrap-heap.

"Weel, then, here's the Rev. Mr Flight," said Peterkin. "We'll see if he'll please ye ony better. Mr Flight is thirty-five years of age, ordained in 1015, an' has already been in three kirks. A reg'lar bird of passage he maun be. Ye'll hae to shoot him on

the wing, so to speak. I think we should let him flee past Pickletillie, John."

" He'll be ane o' the unsettled kind," said Posty. " As soon as he gets a kirk he'll set aboot lookin' for a better ane. His folk'll never hae time to get tired o' him onyway. Still, I'd raither hae the minister that settles doon an' stays for fifty year."

" Then we'll no' invite Mr Flight to licht at Pickletillie. Noo for anither dip into the lucky bag. We'll surely hit upon a treasure soon to reward us for our labours. Weel, here's the Rev. Amos Meek, ' an interesting preacher and a diligent pastor,' an' that's nearly a' aboot him. But Mrs Meek is ' an ideal lady of the manse ; President of the Women's Guild, the Dorcas Society, and the Sewing Circle ; plays harmonium in the church, and trains the choir ; conducts a weekly meeting for young ploughmen ; member of Education Authority and Parish Council.' "

Posty held up his hands.

" Is that a' ? " he asked. " Is she no' the schulemistress as weel ? An' does she no' run the village shop in her spare time ? "

" She maun be a clever, steerin', managin' body," said Peterkin admiringly.

" Ay, but it's no' a minister's wife, but a minister we're electin', Matthew. I'm dootin' Maister Meek'll be what they ca' sair hauden doon—puir soul. Hersel'll be the boss o' that show."

" The minister's wife is near-hand as important as the minister," said Peterkin, " an' mony a kirk is run an' kept goin' by the leddy o' the manse. She sees a hunder things her man, bein' sae thrang wi' his sermons, wad never see though they were shoved

under his very nose, an' she can keep the peace among the choir, a task that wad need the patience o' a Job an' a Job-ess combined. But ye can hae ower muckle o' a guid thing, an' it seems to me this Mrs Meek goes a wee bittie ower the score."

"Imphm!" said Posty, whose sympathies were obviously with the male. "We want a minister that's at the same time a man an' no' a fushionless cratur that needs to ask his wife's permission every time he wants to blaw his nose."

"I see ye're no' for Maister Meek, nor the leddy either, John, so he'll jist hae to gang on the bing, puir chield."

The "bing" was now growing fairly large, but a little further sifting led to three or four likely men being selected. The names of these were submitted to the Vacancy Committee a few nights later in the vestry—Mr Reid, the farmer of Hillend, in the chair.

When Mr Peterkin appeared staggering under the weight of an immense bundle of papers, Chairman and members all held up their hands in horror.

"Guid preserve us, Mr Peterkin," exclaimed Hillend, "have we to warsle through a' that heystack o' dockyments?"

"Na, na, freends," Peterkin reassured them, taking a small parcel from his pocket. "Posty an' me's been a' through them, an' we've sorted an' riddled them oot, an' here's the big tatties, so to speak."

"Thank heaven!" said Hillie. "Here, John"—he addressed the minister's man, who was in attendance—"tak' a' the rest an' burn them up in yer fire. They'll help to heat the kirk on Sunday."

A sigh of relief ran through the Committee as the church officer disappeared with his arms full.

Mr Peterkin then submitted his report on the applications, with Posty standing by to support him.

"We gaed through the wan hunder an' twenty-seeven applications," he explained, and the Committee shivered and blessed themselves as they thought of what they had escaped. "I'll no' can truthfully say that we exactly read ower every ane o' the testimonials. Some o' them was—a—jist a——"

"Jist a parcel o' lees, Matthew," said Hillie. "I ken the kind. We get them wi' samples o' seed an' patent manure."

"But we gaed carefully through a' the mair likely anes. We didna let oor een be dazzled wi' University honours. Some lads that took barrowloads o' prizes and shovelfu's o' gold medals mak's unco wersh, dry preachers and puir ministers."

"Just that," said Hillie, looking at his watch. He had to attend a farmers' supper at the inn that night. "As Robbie says, they

> "'Confuse their brains wi' College classes;
> They gang in stirks an' come oot asses.'

Gang on, Matthew."

"We lookit for signs that the minister was a sensible, kindly sort of chield, a guid visitor, an' a faithful pastor, as well as a guid preacher. Also, we selected married men——"

"Quite richt," said Hillie. "They ken what trouble is, an' can sympathise wi' a' in affliction. Ca' on, Matthew."

"So efter muckle shufflin' o' the cairds, readin' an' rereadin' o' the testimonials, an' considerin' a' the circumstances, we selected three ministers we thocht the pick o' the bunch, an' the congregation can now pronounce upon them."

"Capital!" cried Hillie. "We'll gie the folk their choice, an' then they canna blame us. We'll hae a preachin' match an' let the best man win."

"Ay, that's the way to do," said several members. "Let's get oor ain wale o' them."

"I move that we gie oor best thanks to Matthew and Posty—beg pardon, I mean Mr Peterkin and Mr Malcolm," said Hillie, "an' thank them for the maist satisfactory result o' their labours; an', further, that we leave it to Mr Peterkin to make a' arrangements wi' the candidates."

To this everybody agreed most cordially, and the meeting broke up, the members hastening to spread the news that three ministers had been selected, who would preach before the congregation and seek to win their approval.

## III

## THE PICKLETILLIE CANDIDATES

"That's the man for hiz," declared Tammy Watt, the mole-catcher—once the parish "awful example," but now quite a reformed character and a regular church attender—as the congregation "skailed" on the day the first candidate preached. "Man, his language was shooblime, an' hoo bonnily he describit the wild flooers, an' the wee rabbits pappin' ooten their holes, a' that nateral an' lifelike. A grand preacher, thon."

Now within earshot of Tammy was Peter Tosh, the baker, a little, round, red-faced man with grey whiskers and a fiery temper liable to eruption at any moment. Peter heard and wheeled round.

"Was ye by ony chance referrin' to that parcel o' blethers we had the misfortune to listen to this forenoon, Maister Watt?" he enquired politely.

The mole-catcher stared angrily at him.

"Parcel o' blethers!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Ca' ye that graund, eloquent, beautiful discourse blethers?—indeed!"

Peter Tosh raised both his arms in protest against this rash eulogy, while the passers-by paused to listen.

"Graund! Eeloquent! Beeutiful!" he exclaimed in tones of disgust. "Rotten—that's what I ca' it—perfectly rotten!"

"Tell me what was wrang wi' the sermon?" demanded Tammy.

"Naething whatever—I mean, there was naething in it to be wrang. Jist a curn haivers aboot primroses an' bluebells an' mappies—jist fit for the infants' cless in the schule."

"There's some folk doesna ken a guid sermon when they hear it," retorted the mole-catcher. "In my opeenion, it was a bonnie, weel-pitten-thegither, an' maist steemulatin' discourse."

"Steemulatin'!" echoed the baker, as though that were the very last word in complete nonsense. "But —beg pardon, Maister Watt, it's you that kens a lot aboot steemulants," and with that "nasty one" the irritable little man turned on his heel and hurried away.

Not for years had the church been so full as when the parishioners met to sit in judgment on the first candidate for the vacancy. The congregation was as keenly attentive as it was large. Each worshipper felt that he was sitting on the jury, and had to give a verdict according to his conscience. The candidate, whose name was Anderson, must have found it very trying, poor man.

Mr Peterkin and Posty foregathered on the way home.

"Weel?" asked the former expressively.

"Oh, no' bad," replied Posty. "Jist a wee thing ower sugary an' soft-sawdery for my taste. He'll hae been takin' lessons in eelocution, I'm thinkin', an' he's raither prood o' the result, an' anxious to show off, else hoo did he need to recite the haill o' 'The Dying Christian to His Soul?'"

" I didna like that, an' I'm nane ower favourably impressed wi' Maister Anderson," confessed Peterkin, " but we maun keep an open mind, an' no' decide till we've heard a' the candidates."

That, however, was just what many of the voters could not do, and immediately the parish was divided into Andersonians and anti-Andersonians—those who had liked the preacher and those who hadn't. Many heated discussions took place, and much bad temper was let loose.

Next Sunday's candidate was a Mr Marshall, who turned out to be a tall, clean-shaven, black-haired gentleman, with a deep voice and an impressive manner — quite a change from the flowery Mr Anderson.

As was to be expected, the mole-catcher, who had been busy all week singing the praises of his favourite candidate, did not like this applicant for the parish of Pickletillie. He was quite ready with his pronouncement when a knot of worshippers gathered round him in the kirkyard at the close.

" Ugh ! Thon man mak's me shiver. Siccan a discourse is like a shooer o' cauld water runnin' doon yer back."

" Jist what we've been wantin'," declared Peter Tosh, who had found Mr Marshall very much to his mind. " Some o's, that is. We're needin' to be made to shiver and shake."

" He was awfu' cauldrife," said Alec Donn, the saddler, " wi' his prayers cut and dried like as ilka sentence stood in the middle o' a plate a' its lane. An' his sermon was gey dry and dreich."

" His sermon had some substance in't," retorted

Peter Tosh, " no' like the wersh, fushionless, breid-an'-milk pap we had last Sunday."

" A stane has substance in't," said Tammy Watt, " an' that's jist what yon man is—jist a stane—wi' nae he'rt nor kindliness nor couthiness aboot him."

" He's a man o' intelleck," declared Peter Tosh, " but, of course, them that has nae intelleck canna understand or appreciate sic a cultured preacher," and having once more fired his shot, Peter again marched away.

" A man o' wecht yon," was Peterkin's remark to Posty as they walked up the village street together. " Clear-heidit, strecht, an' soond on the fundamentals, didna ye think, John ? "

" Imphm ! " said Posty doubtfully. " Soond an' clear, I grant ye, but hard man, hard as nails."

" We need nails, though, John, to keep the fabric thegither in thae days. Hooever, I'm no' sayin' I'm a'thegither pleased wi' Mr Marshall. I'm thinkin' he's ane that wad tak' the offeeshial view o' everything. He wad bind us and lead us in red tape."

" We'll bide an' see what the next man's like," said Posty wisely.

Mr Marshall, however, it appeared, had made a great impression, and now the parish was fiercely divided into Andersonians and Marshallites. Everybody was ready to take a side. Even children caught up the controversy, and instead of " Scotch and English " they played at " Anderson and Marshall," and many fights took place between the contending factions.

" I dinna ken what's comin' to the parish," John Malcolm informed Mr Peterkin when he came into the shop on Tuesday afternoon. " They're divided

into twa camps, an' they're fechtin' like cat and dog. Anderson's folk say that Marshall was jist a formalist, whatever that may be—I daursay they dinna ken themsel's—an' Marshall's men say Anderson is naething but a dillytanty. Where they get haud o' sic words bates me to tell."

"I've got plenty o't ower the counter the day, John," said Peterkin, "an', like you, I'm amazed at the pugnashious spirit that's suddenly sprung up among the peaceful folk o' Pickletillie. They were speerin' an' quizzin' to find oot what side I'm on, but feint a yin o' them is a bit the wiser on that score. Fact is, I haena made up my mind."

"Nor hae I, Matthew," said Posty. "I'm no' quite satisfied wi' aether o' the men we've heard. We'd better wait an' see what kind o' a job Mr Procter mak's o't."

Mr Procter was the third candidate. He was a youngish man, not very tall, with a round, mellow voice and a fluent style of preaching that many thought highly effective. He dealt much in personal information, and poured forth anecdotes in an abundant stream.

"Yon's the kind o' sermon ye can mind," said Alec Donn, the saddler, at the customary kirkyard conference. "It was fu' o' interesting pints, an' yon story aboot Dr Guthrie and the ragged bairn was maist affectin'."

"Quite a charming preacher," remarked Miss M'Tavish, stopping to address a group. "So—so human and soulful, you know."

"Ay, jist that," said Tammy Watt, puzzled.

"A very fine young man—just the kind to fill the

church every Sunday. Every one would come to listen to such recherche addresses."

" I'm sure o' that," said Tammy, and when she had passed on, added, " What the dickens is the auld cratur bletherin' aboot ? "

" Mr Procter may no be a married man," said the saddler shrewdly.

Peter Tosh, of course, thought nothing of Mr Procter.

" Bairns' meat served oot wi' a spune," he remarked. " Jist a string o' stories hingin' by their heids like a bunch o' herrin'. Nae connection wi' ilk other. An' as for the text, we never heard o't again efter it was gien oot. Na, na, we dinna want a popular entertainer in Pickletillie pulpit."

Neither Peterkin nor Posty was pleased with Mr Procter.

" Yon aboot his auld auntie an' her cat was gey silly," said Peterkin. " There was nae thocht nor origeenality in yon address—very little o't was his own wark."

" The bairns listened maist attentively, though, Matthew," said Posty. " I saw some o' them sittin' wi' their mouth wide open and their een fixed on the minister as gin he had heepnotised them. He kens hoo to tell a story, that lad. Still, I'll alloo Mr Procter's the ane o' the three that pleases me least."

" Aweel," said Peterkin in tones of perplexity, " we'll hae to mak' up oor minds wha we're to vote for, and it'll be a ticklish business."

The voting on the three candidates was fixed for the following Wednesday, and excitement rose to unheard-of heights as the day approached. The

parish was now divided into three factions—Andersonians, Marshallites, and Procterians. Everybody, young and old, seemed to be a strong supporter of one or the other. Discussions and arguments were heard on all hands. Old friends quarrelled bitterly. Supporters of one candidate could not understand how any sensible person could possibly see anything to admire in the other two.

Posty's reports to Peterkin grew more and more vivid and exciting as the time wore on.

"Tammy Watt seems to be the leader o' Anderson's folk," he explained; "Peter Tosh is the heid champion o' Marshall's, an' Miss M'Tavish an' a wheen o' the women are fell keen on Procter. Alec Donn is for Anderson; Andrew Thomson is for Procter; John Cunningham, the joiner, is against them a', an' says they're naething but shavin's and sawdust."

Peterkin loosened his apron and leaned reflectively over the counter.

"It's Hillie's attitude I wad like to ken," he remarked. Mr Reid, the farmer of Hillend, was Chairman of the Vacancy Committee, and, of course, a person of much consequence. "Hillie doesna say muckle at ony time, an' I've never heard his breath on the subject."

"Supposin' ye gang up an' see him?" suggested Posty.

"Imphm! It micht be weel, but, I declare, it'll no' be necessary, for here he comes himsel' as pat as if he'd been sent for special. Speak o' the deil! Good evening, Mr Reid. It's no' often we hae the pleasure o' seein' you doon here."

Hillie, who was " a man o' wecht," planted himself down in Peterkin's customers' chair and " peched."

" No ; an' it's me wadna hae been here if I hadna wanted your advice an' opeenion, Matthew. An' yours, too, John, for the like o' you gaun continually to an' fro in the parish, an' walkin' up an' doon in it, like the deil in the time o' Job—you hear a' that's gaun on, an' ken what's in everybody's mind. It's this votin' business the morn that's troublin' me."

" Same here," said Peterkin. " John an' me was just discussin' it. The parish is hotchin' wi't as gin it were on the boil. A'body's fechtin' for ane or other o' the candidates, an' quarrelin' ower them like dogs ower a bone. It looks as gin Sawtan had been let loose in oor midst."

" Ay, I've heard a' aboot the collieshangie that's gaun on," said Hillie. " Weel, let them fecht ; it'll dae them nae herm. It's what I'm to dae that bothers me."

" I doot I can gie ye nae help there, Hillie," said Peterkin. " Fact is, I canna decide mysel'. Dod, I'm comin' to understand that chield Hamlet, the lad that could never make up his mind."

Hillie looked at Malcolm, who also shook his head.

" Nane o' the three made a big impression on me," he remarked. " Ane's as guid as another, an' it doesna matter much which o' them we tak'."

" Exactly," cried Hillie with the air of one who sees the light, and at the same time feels greatly relieved. " An' that bein' so, if it doesna matter which o' them we vote for, I'll tell ye what we'll dae " —he put his hand to his mouth and lowered his voice to an impressive whisper—" we'll toss up for't."

"Oh!" exclaimed Peterkin feebly, trying to look shocked, while Posty protested by clicking with his tongue against his lower lip. But Hillie, first looking out to see that nobody was coming, beckoned them to the dim shades at the back of the shop—fitting scene for a deed so dark.

"Heids for—tails against," cried the graceless Chairman of the Vacancy Committee. "Come on, Matthew—what do you say?"

"Er—heids," said Peterkin faintly.

"Weel, this is Anderson, and it's tails. That means you're no' for him. Noo for Marshall. Mercy on us, I hope that's no' onybody comin' in. No. Weel, aince mair. Heids or tails, Posty?"

Again and again the penny spun in the air till all the candidates had been gone over for and against.

"That's the last noo," cried Hillie. "Thank heaven, it's decided! I'm to vote for Anderson; you, Matthew, for Marshall; and you, Posty, for Procter. Naething could be fairer."

"I hope the Kirk Session'll never hear aboot this," groaned Peterkin. "Gamblin' on the election o' a minister!"

"Toots, that doesna trouble me," cried Hillie briskly. "Oor votes'll bé as guid as ony that's cast the morn."

Next morning the parish minister of Balneuchar, Moderator in the vacancy, drove up to the church with a bag of voting papers and other documents. Already there was a knot of people waiting, and all day the voters kept coming. Seldom had there been so many people inside the church on one day—not even at the Sacrament. At six o'clock the doors

were shut, and the Moderator, assisted by Peterkin, proceeded to count the votes. At seven the Moderator appeared at the church door and announced the result to a large and deeply interested crowd. Never had the reverend gentleman had such a large and attentive audience.

ANDERSON, 179
MARSHALL, 160
PROCTER, 158

"And therefore," announced the Moderator, "as no one of the candidates has a clear majority over the others, I declare the election null and void."

Consternation! As by wireless the unfortunate result was broadcast over the parish. Nobody had thought of this, and the general question was—"What was to be done now?" But none could tell, and the next procedure was awaited with keen expectation.

## IV

## HOW THE VACANCY WAS FILLED

The good folk of Pickletillie were greatly put about when it appeared that the voting for a new minister had decided nothing. The three candidates were all too equal for any one of them to be elected. What was to be done now ?

Even the leaders—even Peterkin and John Malcolm —known everywhere as Posty—were at a loss. As for Hillend, Chairman of the Vacancy Committee, he refused to discuss the matter with anybody.

" I'm through wi't," he announced, heavily mounting his gig at the churchyard gate after the result had been made known. " I winna hae no more to dae wi' Vacancy Commytees, meetin's, votin', candidates, applications, testimonials, an' trial sermons. They can a' gang to the muckle fire for me. I'm dune wi't a'. Gee up, Jess. C'wa, lass," and he drove away.

Peterkin, Posty, and a few others looked at each other gloomily.

" It'll be taen ooten oor hands noo," said Peterkin. " The Presbytery'll fill the vacancy, an' we'll just hae to be pleased wi' onybody they like to send."

" Serve them richt," said Peter Tosh gruffly. " Sic eediots they were no' to see that Marshall was the best."

" Heh," said Alec Donn, the saddler, who supported

Anderson, "I'm gled we're no' gaun to hae yon muckle, black, cauldrife bogieman onyway."

"I'm gled we're no' gettin' ony o' them," said Cunningham, the joiner. "They were a wersh, fushionless lot."

Peter Tosh glared at him, but could find nothing to say, for he quite approved of the remark so far as Anderson and Procter were concerned. Then Andrew Thomson, the blacksmith, who supported Procter, approached, and soon the champions of all three candidates were arguing hotly. Peterkin and Posty slipped away.

"The game o' scart me an' I'll scart you is never worth playin'," Peterkin remarked. "They'll be callin' each other fules an' blockheids an' leears in a meenit. We'd better keep ooten the collieshangie, John."

"Queer that folk should quarrel so aboot kirk maitters," said Malcolm. "By the way, hae ye heard who's to preach on Sunday, by ony chance?"

"Ay, it's me can tell ye that," said Peterkin, taking a letter out of his pocket. "It's a young lad frae Edinburgh, sent by Dr Gillies." Dr Gillies was the late minister, now appointed to a church in Edinburgh. "This is a letter frae the Doctor. He says that Thomas Ferguson—that's the lad's name—is a fine preacher, but he's no' licensed yet. He's just finished his College classes."

"Imphm!" said Posty without much interest. "A student tryin' to learn hoo to preach. He'll just be better than naebody."

"The laddie's to be stayin' wi' me," announced Peterkin. "I'll hae to get a machine doon to the junction on Saturday nicht to meet him."

During the rest of the week Peterkin's was a centre where supporters of the three candidates met to argue and discuss and blame each other for the unfortunate result. But it was noticed that the proprietor of the shop had very little to say, and, in fact, nobody ever knew how he and Hillend and Posty had voted, which, in the circumstances, was perhaps just as well.

On Saturday evening Mr Peterkin handed over the shop to his wife and daughter, and, hiring a gig from the inn, drove down to the junction to meet his guest. It was a lovely spring evening. Mavises and blackbirds charmed his delighted ears with their songs as he drove down; the setting sun sent a soft pink radiance over the land; the soft wind caressed his cheek "just like a kiss," as he sentimentally expressed it to the stationmaster, an old friend of his; the pleasant smell of opening flowers gave a balmy fragrance to the air.

It needed only the shrill cries of young lambs to complete the picture of spring beauty. And the cries of young lambs duly sounded forth from a field not far from the station.

"Dear me, what brings you down here on a Saturday evening, Mr Peterkin?" asked the stationmaster, pushing his gold-laced cap back on his head and smiling on Peterkin, who was an important customer of the railway in these parts. "Is business not brisk up-at Pickletillie?"

"We're daein' rael weel, Mr Davidson," said Peterkin. "We're certainly no' makin' fortins. There's no' likely to be ony Carnegies or Rockyfellows among us. We're no' tempted to lay up treasures on the earth. But we're peyin' oor way an'

something to spare, an' so we're contentit an' thankfu'."

"A contented mind is a blessing kind," quoted the stationmaster.

"Wad it were a commoner blessing, Mr Davidson, but as Robbie says:

> 'Human bodies are sic fools
> Wi' a' their colleges an' schools,
> That when nae real ills perplex them
> They mak' enow themsel's to vex them.'

And noo that we're on the crack, I wonder when ye're gaun to extend yer railway to Pickletillie. Fancy stoppin' short o' sic a thrivin' an' important place, an' makin' us travel five mile to the junction! Think o' the business ye're losin'. Man, that five mile o' railway wad pey ye hand ower fist."

"You'll have to go up to London and interview the Directors of the London and North Eastern Railway about that, Mr Peterkin," said the stationmaster. "They might consider the idea. They seem to have plenty of money to spend just now. You might persuade them to make the venture."

"Dod, I think I'll write to them!" cried Peterkin. "They wad maybe gie us a motor 'bus if they didna gie us a railway."

"Nothing beats a trial, Mr Peterkin."

"An' as for my business doon here the nicht, I've come to meet a young man that's to preach in Pickletillie the morn."

The stationmaster laughed.

"Ah-ha! I heard about your election, or rather no election," he cried. "You seem to be very par-

ticular folk up at Pickletillie when none of the three would please you."

"We're very discriminatin' folk, Mr Davidson. We examine what's offered us wi' great care, an' dinna just tak' the first thing that's shoved aneath oor noses. We ken what we want, an' dae oor best to get it."

A distant whistle roused the stationmaster to attention. Two porters hurried on the platform and got barrows ready to convey luggage to the St Mertouns train, which was waiting in the siding. In a few seconds the great express came slowly in, the green and gold engine panting impatiently, as though angry at being made to stop at such an apparently unimportant place. Passengers alighted, newspaper parcels were thrown forth, luggage ejected from the guard's van, while the dining-car attendants looked out, glad perhaps to get a breath of the cool, sweet, flower-scented northern air.

Mr Peterkin stood attentive, and soon noted a tall young man coming along the platform, bag in hand, and not making for the St Mertouns train, as were almost all the others who had alighted.

"You'll maybe be Mr Ferguson frae Edinbury," he remarked.

"The very same—Tom Ferguson," cried the youth, laying down his bag and shaking Mr Peterkin's hand. "You'll be Mr Peterkin, the mentor of Pickletillie?"

"Eh? Na, I'm no' the what-d'ye-ca' it; I'm just a grocer and draper."

"Exactly. Dr Gillies told me all about you."

"Did he, though?" said Peterkin, much pleased. "He hasna forgotten me yet, I'm glad to think."

" Forgotten you ! Why, he's always talking about you. He says he wishes he had an elder like you in St Nathaniel's—so sensible and level-headed and helpful."

Peterkin beamed.

" When ye're young," he remarked, " praise gangs to yer heid and mak's ye swelled-heidit, so beware, Mr Ferguson. But when ye're up in years like me it gangs to yer he'rt an' mak's ye humble."

" A philosopher and a student of human nature ! " cried Tom Ferguson. "I'm delighted to meet you and make your acquaintance, Mr Peterkin."

" Toots, there's naething remarkable aboot me. I'm just a common, five-echths country shopkeeper. But I mauna keep ye gabblin' here, Mr Ferguson. The geeg's waitin' for us ower there, wi a laddie haudin' the pownie. Gie's a haud o' yer bag."

" Not likely. Besides, it's not heavy—nothing in it but my togs for to-morrow and my nightie—I mean, my sleeping attire. What a lovely evening it is, and how glad I am to get out of the city in such weather."

As they drove up to Pickletillie Peterkin took stock of Tom Ferguson. The youth was tall, broad-shouldered, muscular, his face glowing with health ; his features were large and decided, but well shaped. Above his wide eyebrows a mass of fair hair fell back from his broad forehead, and he had large, deep-blue eyes and a captivating smile. His voice was full and powerful, but nicely toned. Altogether a young man very good to look upon and to listen to.

Mrs Peterkin and Johnny and Lizzie took to him at once, and that night half the village learned that

the "supply" was such a nice young man. Johnny and he immediately became fast friends. Hardly had they met than Tom Ferguson asked the boy, "Do you keep rabbits? Do you collect foreign stamps or cigarette cards? Play football or cricket? Got a bike? Made yourself a wireless set?" And soon the two were talking "nineteen to the dozen" on boys' interests.

Ere going to bed they made a secret pact, as the result of which Johnny roused him early next morning, and the two went for a walk before breakfast. When they came back from a visit to the banks of the Fintry, where many blackbirds', thrushes', and hedge-sparrows' nests were discovered, it was surprising how many people were on the street at that time of a Sunday morning.

Johnny proudly introduced him to Alec Donn, the saddler; to Cunningham, the joiner; and even to the redoutable Peter Tosh, the baker.

"Ye're gaun to try yer 'prentice hand on's the day," said Peter amiably. "Weel, of course, ye have to begin sometime."

"Right you are," said Tom Ferguson with a sunny smile. "Even you had to try your 'prentice hand on somebody once, Mr Tosh. I hope there was no bad case of indigestion in consequence."

Thus chaffed, Peter actually smiled.

Tom Ferguson's fine voice sounded across the street, and his genial manner put all stiffness at a distance.

There was a big attendance that day, though the people were drawn together not to hear "the supply," but to discuss the extraordinary state of matters

that had arisen in the parish. Much high and heated debate, scarcely suited to the precincts where the rude forefathers of the hamlet slept, resounded in the churchyard. Champions of the three rejected candidates had much to say about the blindness of those who could not recognise the excellence of their particular man, and many went into the church cherishing wrath, malice, and bitterness in their hearts.

Into the pulpit strode the young giant with the fair hair and blue eyes and the frank, fearless, steadfast face. At first some wondered where the voice came from that announced the opening psalm:

> Behold how good a thing it is,
> And how becoming well,
> Together such as brethren are
> In unity to dwell—

so soft and far away, yet clear and distinct it sounded. And had the psalm been chosen with regard to their present position and disposition one toward another? Deeper notes of that wonderful voice pealed forth in the opening prayer; the reading of the fifty-fifth of Isaiah was such as Pickletillie had never listened to before. Soon everybody was sitting up and regarding this remarkable young man with keen attention.

This was all very well, this elocution business, but what would the sermon be like? Thin stuff, doubtless.

"I was going to preach you a sermon," Tom Ferguson began. "Here it is," and he held up a sheaf of written pages. "But since coming here I have gone about the place a bit, and met some people, and learned something, maybe. So I'm not going to preach the sermon I brought. It was mostly about

German metaphysics anyhow—a dry subject that will keep.

" No. I want to tell you first about an old friend of mine. Auntie Jess, I call her, and everybody calls her in that high, high land in the Canongate of Edinburgh, where she lives. I go to visit her. A student must learn his business somehow, you know, and try his 'prentice hand on somebody."

He glanced at Peter Tosh, who put up his hand before his mouth. Could he really be smiling—in the kirk !

" So I am Auntie Jess's pastor. Her house is very wee, but, oh, so clean. There are flowers in the windows, and at the back she looks away across the chimney tops to the Forth and the blue hills of Fife."

Then came the story of how Auntie Jess looked out on life ; what she saw ; what she thought ; how she loved and helped those around her ; how patient and cheerful she was in spite of much suffering ; and what wonderful lessons she had taught a raw, rather swelled-headed laddie.

" That's me," said Tom Ferguson, pointing to himself.

When he closed they looked round in surprise. Had he really been speaking for twenty-five minutes ? They could have listened for another twenty-five. Many eyes were wet, for the story had been touching and very beautifully told.

At the close Hillend rose in haste, grabbed hold of Peterkin, and led that worthy man out to the churchyard.

" I say," he whispered, " let's ask him. What dae ye think ? "

"I had the same thing in my ain mind," admitted Peterkin.

Other members of the Vacancy Committee came round, all fidgeting with the same notion.

"Ask him," said Peter Tosh eagerly, "ask him, though I doot it'll be nae use."

Thus egged on, they entered the vestry.

"Young man," said Hillie, "will ye tak' it?"

"I—I don't understand," said Tom Ferguson, gazing at the deputation in wonder.

"Will ye tak' this parish? It's yours if ye'll hae it."

"But I—I'm not licensed yet. I'm only sitting my degree exams."

"Ye'll be through or lang. Will ye come?"

So after a little consideration Tom Ferguson said yes.

Seldom had there been a younger and never a better parish minister.

"But we'll no' get keepin' him lang," said Peter Tosh. "The big city kirks'll sune be efter him like wolfs on the trail."

## V

## CALLERS AT THE MANSE

"I SHALL be at home in the manse on Wednesday evening from six to eight, when I shall be glad to meet any who wish to see me regarding church or parish matters."

So the Rev. Thomas Ferguson, the new minister of Pickletillie, announced from the pulpit,

Tom had now been in his new charge for two months. He was one of the youngest of parish ministers, and, as was said about a famous statesman, "few have been so good." Already he had made himself felt. He had started clubs and classes; he had got new voices for the choir; he had set on foot a scheme to raise money for redecorating the church. Now he had started this Wednesday evening audience for the convenience and benefit of any who might wish to consult him.

The young minister was charmed with his new charge. It was a delightful place. Everybody was so kind; everything went on oiled wheels; the troubles that so often beset the ministerial life did not seem to exist in Pickletillie.

It was all very nice, but he did not know how carefully he was guarded and watched over.

For many years the manse had been ruled by the housekeeper, known throughout the parish and be-

yond it as Manse Jess. Miss Cochrane, which was her seldom-used name, had looked well after the late minister, Dr Gillies, both before and after he got married. The vacancy had caused her some anxiety —perchance her reign was at an end—but as soon as she saw the young minister she knew that all was well.

" Want you to stay on at the manse ? " he had exclaimed in answer to her artless enquiry. " Why, I should just think I do. You know the ropes, I guess. Maybe you'll be able to put me up to a thing or two."

Manse Jess said she would never think o' daein' the like, but at the same time she gave a sigh of contentment and relief, and settled down for a further period of office and power. In the task of looking after, shepherding, and guiding the young minister she simply revelled.

From time to time not a few undesirable callers appeared at the manse, but very few of them ever saw the minister.

" Ay, Maister Ferguson's oot." If Jess could say that truthfully to some one who had simply come to make trouble or annoy the minister with some unnecessary request, she said it with much satisfaction. The remark was punctuated by a gentle but decided closing of the door. Unfortunately, Jess's conscience did not allow her to make the announcement untruthfully. In a manse that would not have done. But there were other ways.

" Maister Ferguson's gey an' tired wi' veesitin' the day. Ye'd better come back the morn."

" Maister Ferguson's thrang wi' his sermon for Sunday. It wad never dae to disturb him."

"I'll be sure to tell the minister ye called." Door shut definitely.

And now, without saying a word to Manse Jess, the great, muckle simpleton had given this public invitation to everybody to come and see him on Wednesday evenings from six to eight.

"However," Jess comforted herself, "when they come at other times I'll say, 'Wednesday nicht's the time; ye canna see him the noo.' That'll sort them."

"He's a fine young man," Manse Jess said to her intimates, "but that thochtless and careless, ye wad never believe. I've to watch ower him jist like a bairn to see that he puts on his warm flannels when it's cauld an' changes his socks when they're damp. An' as for the beggars and gangrel bodies, he wad gie the coat off his back to ony o' them that cam' to the door wi' a lang story. Ay, but nane o' them ever gets near him; I see to that. Na, faigs, the minister needs some looking efter, I can tell ye."

On Wednesday evening the first to appear was Peter Tosh, the baker, well known as perhaps the most cantankerous, ill-to-do-with man in the parish. There was nobody Manse Jess disliked more, and she regarded him with a fixed stare, as though he was some interesting curiosity she had never seen before.

"Good evening, Je — Miss Cochrane," hastily amended the baker as he caught her none-too-welcoming look. "It's gey an' weet the nicht."

"Guid evening, Maister Tosh," responded Miss Cochrane formally. "Ay, it's no' a nicht for folk to come oot without guid reason."

"I've come to see the minister," Peter explained, as Jess made no move to open the door.

"Oh, ay"—in a tone which meant, "Hoo daur ye?"—"ay, jist that. There's an unco heap o' glaur on the roads the day. Yer feet'll no' be very clean, I'm thinking. There's a bass ower there," and she directed his attention to a rough mat on which he was invited to wipe his boots. He did so quite meekly and followed Jess into the study.

"Maister Peter Tosh," announced that dignitary in loud, clear tones, as though she would have added, "Set him up."

"Ah, good evening, Mr Tosh," cried the minister, springing to his feet. "I'm so glad to see you. Take a seat. Will you smoke?"

"Na," said Peter, slightly horrified, for this was to be a conference about important church matters. "I dinna smoke that ceegarette trash; it's only fit for lassies."

"Oh, I don't know, but every one to his taste. If you've brought your pipe, please light up," and he lit up and regarded Peter attentively, wondering what doubts and difficulties were troubling the baker.

Peter's round, red face glistened in the lamplight.

"I've come," Maister Ferguson," he began, "to complain aboot the behaviour o' the lassies in the choir. It's fair scandalous, and as ye canna see their ongauns frae the pulpit, it's a' the mair necessary that somebody should ca' yer attention to the maitter. To see them sniggerin' an' simperin' an' laughin' to the young men mak's me fair scunnert. The thing's no' to be tolerated."

"Oh, indeed, really. Dear, dear, to think of that!" The minister was trying to gain time, the while he remembered that Peter Tosh had a son in the choir.

Perhaps that had something to do with his attitude towards the offending young ladies. "I didn't know."

"Of course ye didna, Maister Ferguson, but ye ken noo, an' ye can tak' steps to stop this frivolity, an' mak' the young hizzies behave themsel's. When ye stand up in the pulpit, if ye was just to keek roond the corner, ye wad catch them. Man, they even gang as far as to hand roon' conversation sweeties wi' 'Dae ye love me?' 'Will ye name the day?' 'Wha cut yer hair?' on them. It's as sure as daith. The beadle fund some o' them lyin' on the floor."

"Ah, very unseemly," said the minister, coughing.

"I dinna wonder it mak's ye choke, sir," said Peter. "It fair seeckened me." The minister was really trying not to laugh. "An' as for what gangs on at the practeesin' on Thursday nicht——" and Peter held up his hands as though the ongoings there were too dreadful to describe.

"At the practice—in the church?" asked the minister.

"Weel, maybe no' jist in the kirk, but gaein' hame efter—wi' their arms roond each other's waists, an' kissin' an' cuddlin'. Ye should see them."

"I should certainly like to see them," said the minister, who, be it remembered, was himself very young.

"I kent hoo ye wad feel aboot it, sir. An' is oor young men to be hookit an' tooken in by impident hizzies like thae? I ask ye——" Then there was a knock at the door, and Miss Cochrane, thinking that Peter Tosh had had quite a sufficient innings, put in her head and said, "Miss M'Tavish is waitin' to see ye, sir."

The minister rose with a sigh of relief. Poor man, he didn't quite know what was waiting for him.

"Thank you ever so much, Mr Tosh," he said. "I'll give what you have told me my most serious consideration. Well, good evening, sir, good evening," and almost before he knew what was happening Peter found himself being ushered out by Manse Jess.

Miss Phemie M'Tavish was Pickletillie's old maid, who, it was understood (by an unadmiring parish), had done her best to secure the late minister, and had lost interest in the church when that gentleman unexpectedly married a lady in Edinburgh. But surely she could not have designs on the young man!

"Mercy on us," said Miss Cochrane to herself when Phemie appeared with a simper on her face, "an' her auld enough to be his grannie!"

"Oh, good evening, Miss M'Tavish," said the minister heartily. He knew all the people's names and all about them already. "And how are you?"

"How are you, dear Mr Ferguson?" purred the lady. "That is the important question. I do hope your cold is better."

Tom looked surprised.

"Cold!" he said. "I haven't had a cold."

"You had on Sunday. I noticed it, and I said to myself, 'Oh, I do hope dear Mr Ferguson is being properly taken care of.' Young people"—she nearly said "we young people"—"are apt to be so careless in these matters."

"Oh, I'm quite well, thank you," said the minister shortly. Like most healthy young men, he did not like to be thought out of sorts in any way.

"Ah, but you must be careful, my dear Mr Ferguson.

Your health is so very precious to us all. Your feet now, are they quite dry and warm? That is so important. We catch cold very readily through the feet. Now"—and she produced a little parcel from beneath her cloak—"here is a nice, warm, woolly pair of slippers I've worked for you myself, and I do hope you will wear them. They will keep your feet quite cosy indoors. The design, as you will see, is blue forget-me-nots against a red background. Pretty, aren't they?"

"Oh—er—very," said the minister, a little bewildered.

"I earnestly trust they are the proper size. Allow me, dear Mr Ferguson," and she knelt at his feet and took off one of his rather well-worn leather slippers. "Ah, just what I thought," in a shocked voice, as an undeniable hole in his sock was revealed. "You are not being attended to properly. How distressing! That—that hole now. Might I darn it for you?"

"Oh, it's nothing," said Tom, blushing a little. "I'm such a dreadful fellow for making holes in my stockings."

"Then do let me undertake the mending of them," cried Phemie, clasping her hands. "It would be a labour of love, I assure you. The slipper fits you nicely. Now isn't it comfortable?"

"Oh—most—very," said the minister.

"Allow me to fit on the other one, no matter what dreadful revelations there may be," said Miss M'Tavish, alluding, of course, to the possibility of discovering a hole in the other sock. "Ah, just as I expected." There was one. "Dear, dear Mr Ferguson—how

shocking! Well, these slippers will keep your feet warm and comfortable until these dilapidations have been made good. Allow me to fit on the other slipper," and just then the door opened again, and Miss Cochrane appeared.

For a second or two she stood motionless, amazed. What on earth was the woman doing kneeling at the minister's feet? As if in answer, Miss M'Tavish calmly went on fitting the slipper on the left foot.

"Er—Miss Cochrane," said the minister awkwardly, "Miss M'Tavish has kindly brought me a pair of nice cosy slippers."

"Oh!" snorted Manse Jess.

"And in fitting them on dear Mr Ferguson's feet I have made a dreadful discovery—two dreadful discoveries," announced Miss M'Tavish, pointing accusingly to the minister's bare toes peeping through the holes.

"Oh," said Jess again, "thae holes wasna there this mornin'."

"That's what I told Miss M'Tavish. I make holes in my socks while you wait, so to speak," said the minister.

"I am going to darn Mr Ferguson's socks," announced Phemie. "I think we arranged that, dear Mr Ferguson? I will see that your feet are comfortable."

Miss Cochrane's glare might have produced an electrical discharge in the room. The minister was conscious of it, and wriggled uneasily.

"Oh, no, Miss M'Tavish, it's—it's quite unnecessary, I assure you. Is there some one waiting for me, Miss Cochrane?"

" There's a gentleman been waiting this ten minutes. Miss M'Tavish'll be gaun noo, I'm thinkin'."

" Good evening, dear Mr Ferguson," said Phemie, holding out her hand, but Jess hustled her away almost ere he could grasp it, and Miss M'Tavish was outside in record time.

The " gentleman " waiting to see him was a young ploughman in his Sabbath best, with whom Tom Ferguson immediately felt at ease.

" My name's Tam Gordon," he announced.

" Sit down, Tam. Take this chair by the fire. Have a cigarette ? It's cold and wet to-night, isn't it ? "

" Ay, it's cauld ; it's very cauld," said Tam, but as the sweat was standing on his brow, it might have been thought that he, at least, did not feel much cold.

" And what can I do for you, Tam ? " asked the minister when his visitor had sat for half a minute gazing silently in front of him.

The young ploughman wriggled in his chair, and at length blurted out with hotly-blushing cheeks :

" I'm—gaun—to—get—married."

" Oh, so that's it. Capital, man, capital. And who is the young lady ? "

" Eh—she's no' a young leddy—she's jist Jeanie White—the lass at the Mains."

The minister smiled boyishly, then checked himself. Was it not his duty to give some advice, some warning in these circumstances ?

" Er—marriage is a great responsibility," he began, trying to speak gravely. " It entails serious obligations, and should not be entered into lightly. But I suppose you have considered all that ? "

Tam looked startled.

"Then dae ye think I shouldna gang ony farrer wi't?" he asked.

"By no means, provided you have already considered it carefully. Now I suppose you want me to proclaim the banns?"

"I cam' to put in the cries——"

"That's it—same thing." The minister took up his pen and a sheet of paper. "Banns of marriage between Thomas Gordon—your occupation?—ploughman—yes — Mains of Divot, and Jeanie White, spinster—— "

"Na, she's no' that; she's a dairymaid at the Mains."

"Same thing, Tam. There, I've got it all down, and I'll attend to it on Sunday. Now when is the wedding?"

"Next Wednesday nicht at seven."

"I'll be there in good time. There'll be a dance, I hope?"

"Oh, ay, we're to hae twa fiddlers an' a piper to play."

"Splendid! It'll be a jolly evening. Well, good luck to you, Tam, and all good wishes for your bride —a right bonnie lass I'll be bound."

"She's a that, sir," said Tam Gordon, "and far ower guid for the like o' me."

Tom Ferguson slapped him on the back.

"They all are, bless you, but it doesn't do to let them know it. Well, good-night, Tam, and count on me next Wednesday night."

When Miss Cochrane brought in his supper the minister became conscious of a strong smell of burning.

"Something on fire, Miss Cochrane?" he asked, sniffing.

"Only some rubbitch I was burning at the back o' the kitchen grate," replied Jess calmly.

The said "rubbitch" was poor Miss M'Tavish's embroidered slippers.

The Rev. Thomas Ferguson has not repeated his announcement inviting callers at the manse on Wednesday evenings.

## VI

## THE PICKLETILLIE GATHERING

WHAT we want to liven up this place in the summer," remarked Posty, otherwise John Malcolm, Mr Peterkin's special crony, " is games."

Posty had dropped in at Peterkin's one Friday evening when things were slack to discuss this notion he had in his mind.

" In the first place, John," remarked Peterkin judicially, rolling up his apron, displacing a box of kippers and a tub of salt butter, and leaning comfortably over the counter, while Posty sat on the drapery counter opposite against a background of blouses and camisoles, with a festoon of real silk stockings over his head, " in the first place, I'm not aware that Pickletillie stands specially in need o' livenin' up, as ye ca' it. Oor village is not exactly a bed o' sloth or a slum for dullness."

" Still, Matthew, we could dae wi' a wee thing mair steer in the hint o' summer efter the hey's in an' afore the hairst begins."

" We want steer, div we ? And what do ye mean by ' games ' exactly, John ? " queried the grocer.

Posty sprang up, waved his arms, kicked up his heels and cried " Hooch ! "

" Hielant Fling, Reel o' Tulloch, sword dance, bagpipe playin', puttin' the stone, tossin' the caber, throwin'

the hammer, runnin' an' jumpin'. The Pickletillie Highland Gathering. Chieftain, Mr Peterkin."

The grocer laughed.

"Toots, John, ye wadna hae me maskeradin' in a kilt, wad ye?"

"What for no? Ye've got the very feegur for't. No' that a kilt's necessary, of course."

A smile came over Peterkin's face. He seemed to like the idea.

"Highland sports," he remarked, "is just grand. Ye gar young men develop their muscles; ye spread a likin' for Hielant dances an' music; ye gie the folk a day's diversion in the open air——"

"And bring a lot o' siller to the place forby," said Posty.

This consideration was not likely to be lost on the village's principal shopkeeper.

Peterkin placed his hands together and looked thoughtfully in front of him, turning over the proposal in his mind, while Posty smoked steadily on, feeling pretty sure that Peterkin would like this notion of his and help to carry it out.

"We wad need siller," he remarked at length. "Few things in this world, frae carryin' on a kirk to runnin' a sports day, can be managed without that. Mr Reid o' Hillend, or maybe the laird, wad gie us a park for naething, but we wad hae to provide medals an' prizes for the competitors. We wad hae to erect a grand stand and a platform for the dancin'. We wad need tents and seats and fences and so on. We'll hae to send roond the hat in the very first place, John."

"I've nae fear we'll get a' we want, Matthew," said

Posty. " The thing'll gang like wildfire when we jist gie them a glint o' what's afoot."

Peterkin's mind ran rapidly on, already arranging the details of the enterprise.

" We'll hae to bring the thing afore the folk, an' haud a meetin', an' form a Commytee. We'll need a Secretary an' a Treasurer, an' judges o' the dancin' an' jumpin'. Then there's starters an' umpires an' somebody they ca' a clerk o' the course."

" They'll leave a' the details to you, Matthew," declared Posty, " weel kennin' they couldna be in better hands."

" That may be, John," admitted the village great man. " Still, ye ken, in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. We'll hae to consult them, at least, seein' we'll need their siller."

So next day a written notice appeared in Mr Peterkin's shop window calling on all who approved of holding a Highland Gathering to meet in the Schoolroom, and at the resulting meeting a Sports Committee was formed and arrangements made to hold the Gathering on the first Saturday of August.

Highland sports soon became the chief interest of the parish. Would-be competitors began to practise, and in stackyards, in back gardens, and down by the river bank you might see them in the long-lit summer evenings " putting " big round stones, whirling heavy hammers, tossing logs of wood, jumping over gates, running races. One or two made the evening melodious—some said hideous—with the long-drawn-out wail of the bagpipes as " MacCrimmon's Lament," " Mrs Macleod of Raasay," and " The Hundred Pipers " trembled on the air. Dancers practised on

kitchen floors with melodeons for music; an enterprising teacher of dancing from St Mertouns started a class for Highland steps. The talk at the kirk door on Sunday and at the smithy on week nights was all about distances, records, styles of running and jumping, second wind, and staying power. Great feats were reported, such as that Tam Herd, the young ploughman at Hillend, had beaten everybody with ease at a mile race along the high road; and Jack Thomson, the journeyman blacksmith, had thrown a tree trunk right across the river, while no others could hurl it more than half-way. As there were to be children's events, the boys and girls of the parish were also hard at work running and jumping, tumbling about in sacks, and practising three-legged and egg-and-spoon races.

But Mr Peterkin had something bigger in his mind's eye than merely local performances. There must be contests open to all-comers. Noted performers must be secured. So he put some advertisements of medals and handsome money prizes to be won in the daily papers, and soon athletes, pipers, and dancers all over Scotland—and even in England—were writing for programmes of the Pickletillie " events."

" We'll make the Pickletillie Gathering famous an' namely amang the glens an' the bens," Peterkin explained to Posty. " We'll be upsides wi' Skye an' Oban an' Inverness. Oor gold and silver medals'll be the bonniest an' oor money prizes the biggest. That's the way to draw the prize pipers an' champion loupers."

His enthusiasm spread, as honest enthusiasm always does. Subscription sheets taken round the parish by

Posty, by Nicholson, the minister's man, and by Peterkin himself brought in large sums. The beadle might even have been seen furtively bringing his list under the notice of well-to-do farmers at the kirk door on Sunday. Being well provided with money, the Committee (really another name for Mr Peterkin) felt themselves justified in doing the thing in grand style.

Mr Reid, the farmer of Hillend, proved more than willing to give his best grass park, lying conveniently to the high road, and nicely shaded by trees. Cunningham, the joiner, fashioned a smooth-surfaced platform for the dancers, and put together a " grand stand " for the more favoured spectators, which was by and by to be decorated by the school children with heather and rowan berries. Messrs Peter Tosh & Son, the village bakers, made ready for a busy day as official purveyors. Glasgow jewellers were commissioned to strike the prize medals, which bore on one side a Highlander in full Celtic panoply, and on the other the name of the place and date, and the mottoes, selected by Mr Peterkin, " Mens sana in corpore sano " and " Aye croose and canty," as a happy blending of the wisdom of Juvenal and a homely country-side sentiment. Authorities on dancing, piping, and athletics offered their services as judges, and all seemed ready for the great day.

For some time it had been evident to his friends that Mr Peterkin's face wore a preoccupied, almost worried expression, but Posty and the others put it down to these manifold labours and responsibilities. And in a measure they were right. The truth was, the excellent village grocer, draper, and general merchant had a grave problem on his mind, which he anxiously

debated in front of his looking-glass or standing before his shop window, wherein he obtained a full-length view of himself. At last he came to a decision.

"Eh, Easy," he said to his wife as they sat at tea one afternoon in the parlour above the shop, whence Peterkin could keep an eye on approaching customers and hasten down if it was any one of consequence, or a bad payer whose account was in arrears, and who might rashly be given further credit by his daughter, then representing him at the counter, "ye mind o' my auld Auntie Macbean?"

"Fine that," responded his better half. "Auntie Phemie that lived in Aberfeldy. What about her?"

Peterkin adjusted his necktie and smoothed his hair, now growing somewhat thin on top.

"Well, ye see, she's oor Hielant forebear. We belang to the Clan Macbean,"

"I suppose so. But what good will that do us?"

"Weel, ye see, the Macbean'll be oor family tartan."

"Yes," said his wife, beginning to see light. "I've got a scarf o't Lizzie wore when she was a bairn, sent her by Auntie Phemie."

"Have ye, Easy?" cried her husband eagerly. "I wad like to see it—to see the pattern, like. For if I'm to be Chieftain o' the Gathering it behoves me to wear the family tartan—in a—a kilt, of course," and he looked unconcernedly out of the window.

"Oh, but ye would look fine in a kilt, Matthew," said his wife loyally, and she went to get the tartan scarf.

The Macbean tartan, it appeared, had a solid red background, against which glowed transverse stripes of blue, green, and purple. The effect reminded

Peterkin of a peacock's tail, a rainbow, and the glories of Solomon. Delighted with its grandeur, he immediately wrote to a firm of outfitters, giving his height, dimensions round the waist, and other particulars, and commissioned them to rig him out in full Highland garb of the Macbean tartan—kilt, hose, green jacket and waistcoat with silver buttons, and silver-mounted sporran. When the big parcel at length arrived he arrayed himself, not without some little difficulty, in these gorgeous habiliments, and proudly showed himself to an admiring family circle. Soon it got abroad that the Gathering was to be graced by a Chieftain in the garb of his ancestral clan, and a representative of the *St Mertouns Gazette, Craigport Journal, and Pickletillie News* came and photographed him, and the week before the Gathering the paper came out, under the heading "Chieftain of the Pickletillie Highland Gathering," with a well-printed portrait of Peterkin in kilt, hose, sporran, jacket, and Glengarry bonnet bearing the Macbeans' badge in silver. The paragraph gave an account of his career, told what he had done for the famous village, and referred in graceful terms to his connection with the celebrated Clan Macbean, of which nobody in the place had ever heard before.

This was all very nice, and as the good man had not yet ventured to show himself in public in his Celtic rig-out, he was much obliged to the newspaper for breaking the ice, so to speak. Posty and the minister's man inspected him carefully, and pronounced his get-up to be perfect. "Hielant as the heather," declared Posty. "Ye can near smell the peat reek."

But a great ordeal awaited the scion of the Mac-

beans. It was part of Peterkin's creed that all new garments must be worn for the first time at church, so on the coming Sunday he must appear in all the glory of the Macbean tartan, and, moreover, it was his day at the plate.

"Ay, it'll be a tryin' sitooation," he remarked to Posty, "but, as ye ken, John, I'm no' the man to flinch."

"Toots, Matthew," said his friend reassuringly, "plenty folk gang to the kirk in kilts. In the Hielant kirks kilts is a' the go. The King himself puts on ane at Balmoral on Sundays."

But evidently the elder had certain qualms.

"They say the coat o' mony colours Jacob gied to his son Joseph was made o' tartan, so we hae a Scriptorial precedent so far," he remarked. "Still, John, that was a coat, no a kilt."

Pickletillie kirk had a sensation that Sunday such as it had not enjoyed since twenty years ago an energetic young probationer knocked to pieces the pulpit book-board, undermined by dry-rot, and sent the big Bible crashing down on the precentor's head. The eyes of approaching worshippers grew round with wonder and admiration when they fell upon the resplendent vision beside the plate, and many went into the church quite forgetting to drop in their pennies. It was generally held that never had kirk door been graced by such a picturesque and dignified elder. Comments were made, indeed, on the whiteness of Mr Peterkin's knees, but none on the symmetry or proportions of his legs, which, it was felt, were admirably designed to set off the kilt and hose.

"If ye could just speak the Gaelic," said Donn, the saddler, as they crowded round him at the close of the service, "ye wad be a Hielant chief to the life."

"Dod, I'll maybe manage that yet," replied the enthusiastic "Celt." "Us Macbeans doesna do things by halves aince we begin. Though oor claymore was last drawn at Culloden, oor Hielant spirit is as keen as ever."

"This means the success o' oor Gatherin' onyway," declared Thomson, the blacksmith. "Nae other'll hae sae grand-lookin' a Chief."

"Toots, Andrew," said Peterkin modestly. "Ye'll mak' me oot a bird o' parrydise among the craws. It'll be the weather that'll really make the success or failure o' the Gatherin'. What think ye o' oor prospecks in that airt?"

But though there were several famous weather experts among them—men whose work took them out of doors in all seasons—such as Tammy Watt, the molecatcher; Henry Halliday, the mason; and old Sandy Black, the carrier, who had seen eighty-nine summers and winters, none would venture to prophesy so far as a week ahead.

"The Lammas floods is due the morn," remarked Reid of Hillend, or "Hillie," "an' that comes as reg'lar as rent day. When it's by ye can coont on dry weather till the middle o' August."

"No, on the Twelfth, Hillie," declared Mitchell, the laird's gamekeeper. "Ten to wan it's a doonpoor that day."

"The Twelfth doesna bother hiz," rejoined the farmer, "but if ye say it's namely for rain, gamie, we'll allow ye to ken."

"There's some dirt in the sky the now," observed the saddler, casting his eye up to certain black clouds hanging over the top of Cathlaw. "That'll be the Lammas floods comin'."

"Jist that," said Hillie. "I smell rain. It'll be haill water afore nicht, wait or ye see."

And they did see without much waiting, for by afternoon rain had begun to fall heavily. All Monday it poured; Tuesday was little better; on Wednesday the skies were still dripping, and as the dreary week wore on Peterkin's face grew longer. You could almost have told what the weather was like by its air of increasing gloom.

"Oor Gatherin'll be ruined," he said to Posty on Wednesday evening. "There'll be naebody there except the dancers an' pipers an' jumpers. An' fancy me haein' to wear a waterproof ower my kilt an' carry an umbrella!"

"Cheerio, Matthew," said Posty, tapping the barometer. "See, it's risin' at last. The flood's gaun to abate."

Apparently he was right, for at that very moment the clouds parted, and a gleam of watery sunshine came through. The rift widened, the rain clouds disappeared, and a beautiful sunset gave promise of a fine day on the morrow.

Next day was cloudless. Mr Peterkin, taking off his shutters in the early morning sunshine, hailed his neighbour opposite, Peter Tosh, the baker, also opening for the day.

"Hurray, Peter! Grand weather at last!"

"Huh! D'ye think sae," grumbled Peter Tosh, a little, red, round-faced man, and the grumpiest person

in Pickletillie. "Ye're gey easy pleased wi' the day an' hit hardly begood yet."

"Man, it'll be grand for the Gathering on Saturday. I'm sure o' that noo."

"Dod, it'll no' fash me wan way or the ither. I'll be in the bakehouse a' day makin' steak pies an' rooburb terts, scones, cookies, buns, an' ett settery. That's a' the sports I'll see."

"Weel, ye'll get the siller onyway, Peter, and ye canna hae it baith ways, ye ken."

In high spirits Peterkin and his Committee went forth to prepare the field, to assist in erecting and decorating the grand stand, and to put up tents for the judges and competitors. Not another drop of rain fell that week, and on Saturday in glorious sunshine was held the first annual Highland Gathering at Pickletillie.

## VII

## PETER TOSH'S TEA GARDEN

"Hot, say ye? Ay, it's fell warm—a rale guid auld-fashioned summer same as we used to hae in the days o' wir youth, when we dookit in the Fintray frae mornin' till nicht, an' the bonnie summer days wasna near lang enough for us."

Mr Peterkin, in his shirt sleeves, stood at the door of his shop under the green cotton sunshade which protected his drapery window from the strong light.

It was one of the warmest days of the hottest, driest summer Pickletillie could remember.

Peterkin, ready to pass the time of day with all wayfarers, had been joined by his neighbour, Peter Tosh, the baker, in answer to whose complaints he made this remark. Peter's shop and house and garden were on the other side of the street a little farther down, next to the woodyard of Cunningham, the joiner.

"Het! Roastin'! Fair frizzling! Gin ye was a baker, Matthew, an' had to stand aside an oven at ninety-five degrees forrin' heat—an' a'body kens that's the hettest kind o' heat—ye wadna craw sae croose aboot the guid auld-fashioned summers."

Peter Tosh was a little man, with a bald head and a round, red, irritable-looking face. His general attitude towards everything was a prolonged grumble.

"Aweel," said Peterkin soothingly, "a'body kens best where his ain shoe pinches."

"No that I'm deid set against auld-fashioned things," Peter went on. "Hech, oo dinna get enough o' the auld ways noo; it's what can we change, what new-fangled cantrip can we interjooce. There's Chay, my son, wants to start a tearoom an' ca' it 'The Cylists' Guffaw,' or something daftlike," and his tone was exceedingly contemptuous.

"It'll be caffy he means," suggested Peterkin with a twinkle. "Man, it's a grand notion; and there's a hantle cyclists passin' through here in the summer. Ye should certainly start a refreshment-room for them, Peter. Just clear oot yer back shop, put in a wheen chairs an' tables, an' there ye are."

"Imphm! But it's no' just a tearoom Chay's thinkin' o'—it's a tea gairden, bless ye! He wants to clear oot the henhoose an' put up a tent—no, beg pardon, a markee—an' some garden seats an' a big red umbrelly," and Peter raised his hands and also his voice, as though this were the last thing in mis-summer madness.

"Better an' better!" cried Peterkin with enthusiasm. "Ye'll hae pic-nics an' excursions; ye'll hae the Young Men's Literary Society frae St Mertouns an' the Young Weemen's Christian Association frae Craigport—no on the same day, of course—an' the Good Templars frae Balneuchar, a' drinkin' tea an' leemonade and eatin' pies an' cookies. An' droothy travellers, forjaskit wi' the heat, when they get a glint o' yer bonnie bit bield'll gie a sigh o' delicht, an' stop an' enter like pilgrims into the Delectable City. An' wi' the braw young lads an' their bonnie joes

it'll be rale lichtsome an' cheery. An', forby, there's money in't, Peter."

"A' daft nonsense, in my opeenion," grumbled the baker; "but Chay's keen on the ploy."

"Ye mauna discourage him, Peter. Try it for a summer, an' see. Be enterprisin,' man; be a sport; move wi' the times."

"Move where—into the Bankruptcy Coort?"

"Never a fear—to the heicht o' fame an' success. Dod, man, Tosh's Tearoom Treats wad soon be kent a' ower the county, an' a new glory wad be added to the village an' parish o' Pickletillie."

It seemed that Peter Tosh was really thinking of making this amazing new departure, and had come to consult Peterkin about the purchase of certain articles of grocery—tea, sugar, butter, fruit, and aerated waters—required for such a venture.

"And wha's to attend to the tearoom for ye?" asked Peterkin when these matters had been arranged.

"Eh? Wha but me an' Chay?"

Peterkin smiled.

"I think I see you runnin' wi' three cups o' tea in ae hand and a plate o' cookies in the other, an' the young birkies and impident flappers cryin' to ye to 'Hurry up, Peter.' No, ye'll need to get a smart lassie to do the waitin'."

"Haivers! I'll have nae glaikit, hilty-skilty lassie aboot the place."

"But it's no' haivers; it's just the thing to make the affair a success. And—surely Providence maun hae arranged it—there's auld David Darling and his wife back frae Glasgow, and settled down here to spend their old age, and their dochter Phyllis—ye'll

mind o' her, Peter—a fine tall, guid-lookin', smart lassie, that's in ane o' thae swell tearooms in Sauchiehall Street—wants to come home to be aside her parents. Just the very thing. Peter! Engage Phyllis for yer waitress, an' the success of the affair is assured."

Peter shook a dour and disbelieving head, but Chay, on hearing of the suggestion, saw at once the advantage of having a Pickletillie girl with Glasgow experience to run the tearoom. So Phyllis was secured, and Cunningham, the joiner, painted a neat sign—"Tea Garden. Pic-nic Parties catered for at Moderate Rates," and nothing was wanted but the patronage of a public hungry and thirsty, with a thirst capable of being assuaged by tea and lemonade.

And of such patronage it speedily appeared there was no doubt and no lack. Phyllis saw to that, and her attractions prevailed. She had dark eyes and dark brown hair, coiled over her ears in a way Pickletillie had never seen before, and her silk blouses were the wonder and despair of the parish.

For some years Phyllis had been the belle of the Red Carnation Tea Palace, in Sauchiehall Street, where the girls wear red carnations in their hair, and are noted for their beauty and smartness, and also for the excellent marriages they make. Renfield Street clerks and smart stockbrokers, with flowers in their buttonholes, drop in of an afternoon, and as they sip the excellent tea take stock of Maude or Flossie bustling about; then they ask her name and when she is free, and before long she is being introduced to mamma at Dumbreck or Dowanhill Gardens, and mamma thinks Fred might do worse,

and so the trick is done. Of this admiration Phyllis had had her share; there were even rumours of an engagement to a wealthy young shipping agent, but evidently there was nothing in it, for she settled down to the pleasant task of running Tosh's Tearooms, and enrapturing all the male youth of the district —even to St Mertouns and Craigport—entirely in the manner of one heart-whole and fancy free.

Peter Tosh's shop seemed a different place with Phyllis behind the counter. Even the cookies looked less stodgy and the Paris buns not so like slabs of concrete. It was wonderful how fond young lads became of going for the morning rolls or for tea-bread in the afternoon for their mothers and sisters. The said mothers and sisters wondered at first, but soon understood. It was the fascination of "that Darling girl."

Phyllis had a stream of light conversation such as Pickletillie had never listened to before. She could talk to a couple of admirers at once, and as she neatly tied up half a dozen cookies or a Madeira cake could keep each amused and make each feel that he was the favoured one.

At the beginning Miss Phyllis caused a small earthquake in the shop by mildly suggesting that the fancy bread made by Messrs Peter Tosh & Son left something to be desired in the way of lightness and variety —for tearoom purposes, that was.

Peter had come up the stairs from the bakehouse with a tray of rock cakes on his head, and Phyllis seized the opportunity to remark pleasantly:

"Ah, rock cakes—pretty hard—paving stones or concrete blocks we called them at the Red C. Of

course, they must be hard and heavy, but not the Paris buns and currant cakes and Coburgs."

Peter set down the tray, and glared and panted, while the intrepid damsel went unwittingly on.

"And then we want meringues, cream cookies, sausage rolls, walnut cakes, jam rolls, chocolate biscuits, and things like that to tempt people to eat a lot, you know."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Peter, his face ten degrees redder than usual. He was now perfectly sure he had heard aright. His ears were not playing him some strange trick. "An' so, miss, oor buns an' cookies we've been supplying to the people o' Pickletillie for forty years, to the complete satisfaction o' the parish, is hard, is they? An' oo dinna ken hoo to mak' jam rolls, an' oo never heard o' mayrangs?"

"Evidently not," said Phyllis, little thinking that she might be the death of a respectable, long-established baker, "else why don't you make them?"

For perhaps the first time in his life words failed him, and he tottered downstairs to be met by Chay coming up.

"M-michty!" he spluttered, "Miss Impidence up there is no' pleased wi' wir tea-bread that we wis pleasing the public wi' twenty years afore she was born!"

"I'm not quite pleased with it either, dad," said Chay cheerfully. "It needs to be improved in quality and variety if we want the tearoom to boom. I'll see about it at once. We must buck up, dad."

Again speechless, Peter retired to the bakehouse, and said some things in front of the oven highly calculated to raise its temperature. But it was noted

that from that day Peter Tosh & Son began to supply the most delightful tea cakes, and the tea garden flourished accordingly.

There was one thing for which the firm was justly celebrated, and that was their meat pies, which for over a generation had been the favourite Saturday night supper of Pickletillie. They were made only on Saturday evening, and you got them hot, crisp, and deliciously fragrant of warm pastry and gravy. When Phyllis began to sell them they went liker hot cakes than ever. Her admirers leant over the counter while she tied them up, and asked her if she was to be in the choir to-morrow, and would she be in the mood for a walk in the afternoon ?

Tom Collins, the journeyman blacksmith, and Willie Cunningham, the joiner's youngest son, were specially " gone " on Phyllis. One evening Tom dropped into the shop, and after much dalliance and buying of sweets slipped a paper into her hand, and hurried off shamefacedly, as though he had given her a bad five-pound note. She opened the paper, and read this neat acrostic :

Pretty maiden of the tearoom
How I long to make you mine.
Youth and beauty shine upon thee,
Lovely mouth and eyes divine.
Lively wit and sparkle hast thou.
I'm in such a tremble lest thou
Should'st refuse this suit of mine.

This was very nice—almost as nice as could have happened in the Red Carnation—and Phyllis blushed and sighed, but stopped and smiled as Willie Cunningham came in. He, too, it appeared, was in want of

chocolates, and when he had got them he blurted out:

"Tom fancies himself as a poet, but what price this?" and putting a paper in her hand, slipped away without waiting to hear what she had to say. His sentiments were simpler:

Beauteous maid of Mr Tosh,
I adore you,
Sigh before you,
Though my poetry is bosh.

"Silly fellows," laughed Phyllis. "Well, well," and carefully tore the scraps of paper into little bits, which surely did not say much for her tender interest in her two young admirers.

One Saturday evening, while the summer dusk was falling, Phyllis looked specially bewitching as she flitted about the tea garden, which had been thronged with guests from an early hour. There was a sparkle in her eye that lighted not a few conflagrations; a smile on her lips that roused other smiles and made many masculine hearts beat quicker.

When Tom Collins entered, bent on the usual Saturday evening's purchase, she whispered to him:

"Will you be at church to-morrow, Tom?"

"Sure thing!" replied the youth fervently.

"Then that's all right." The enrapturing smile conveyed worlds of tender meaning, and Tom hied him homewards to dream of the morrow, and also to get out his Sunday suit and select a specially smart tie to wear.

But when Willie Cunningham came in a few minutes later the artful Phyllis whispered to him:

" You'll be sure to be at church to-morrow, Willie ? "

" Oh, quite certain," muttered he, catching the witch light in these sparkling eyes.

" Then that'll be all right," said Phyllis, and Willie too went home to dream of the morrow. To four others the faithless Phyllis said the same thing, and each youth fondly saw himself escorting her home, envied of all the others and the proudest swain in the parish.

The Rev. Dr Gillies, the excellent parish minister of Pickletillie, might well be delighted to see so many earnest-looking young men in church that morning. Perhaps he put it down to the fact that there had been a written bill on the church gate during the week announcing that he was going to preach on " Perplexities of the Pentateuch." If he thought so. the minister's wife certainly did not. Ministers' wives know and see a lot.

All eyes were fixed on the choir enclosure, whose foremost seat at least six young men were prepared to affirm would shortly be occupied by the peerless one. So they waited and watched with all their eyes what time the bell overhead pealed forth its summons over the village and quiet woods and fields. But the bell " rang in," the beadle appeared with the books, the minister entered the pulpit, and still no Phyllis.

The six young men—and all the rest—may have attended closely to the sermon, or they may not, but it is quite certain that they attended with poignant and painful intensity to the announcement at the close.

" There is a purpose of marriage," read Dr Gillies as baldly as if it had been a sale of work or a potato

roup, and in a silence amid which you could almost hear the spiders creeping on the church roof, " between Frederick William Gilbert, residing in Nithsdale Road, in the parish of Pollokshields, Glasgow, and Phyllis Darling, spinster, residing in this parish, of which full and final proclamation is hereby duly made."

Somehow the hapless half dozen drew together on their homeward way, led to each other by a common disillusionment, and the things they said about Phyllis, if emphatic, were by no means unkindly.

They allowed that though there had been much fun and daffing, she had never really led them on ; it had been good sport, nothing more. So they forgave her and wished her much happiness, and immediately started a subscription sheet for a wedding present.

## VIII

## MR PETERKIN'S LITTLE JAUNT

'THE First o' Aprile," observed Mr Peterkin, turning over on the counter the letters Malcolm the postman had just handed to him, "is just like any other first noo, John. Its auld-farrant glory has departed. Fulish as we a' may be nowadays, we dinna ettle to mak' fules o' each other. Dod no."

"It's no' necessary, ye think, Matthew?" queried the postman, slinging his bag over his shoulder. "We're a nation o' fules already."

"Some folk think so, appearin'ly, John, judgin' by thae," and he held up two documents—one from a stockbroker who ardently desired to make Peterkin's fortune in oil; the other offering untold riches in a new company with a list of distinguished names on the directorate. "They maun take us up here, John, for the kind o' fules that's easily parted frae their money."

"You couldna flourish without some o' that kind, Matthew," remarked the postman, glancing at Peterkin's drapery counter, where, balancing "New Season's Rhubarb" and "Choice Marmalade Oranges," were displayed "Newest Spring Hats" and "Latest Spring Jumpers" at two or three guineas each.

"They're capital value, John, and rale bonnie forby," retorted the grocer-draper. "I suppose your

guidwife'll be lookin' in to see them one o' these days."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Malcolm, making for the door, where stood his red official bicycle, on which he rode to the uttermost ends of Pickletillie parish. "Weel, I'll hae to be takin' the road. It's a bonnie April mornin'. It's a pleasure to be abroad on a day like this."

"Ay, ye hae a grand, canny job, John, paradin' the country like a towerist, an' crackin' croose wi' ilka ane ye meet. See an' no let onybody make an Aprile fule o' ye."

"Same to you, Matthew," retorted the postman.

"Eh, nae fear o' me, John. I'm no' sae green. Dry, weel-seasoned wood doesna burn easy," and with a well-pleased smile at his own wit Peterkin turned to a customer who had been waiting in the shop for some time with a list of groceries in his hand.

"Well, Sammy, what can I hae the pleasure o' supplyin' you wi' this mornin'?" he asked pleasantly. "Dod, this is grand weather for you farm chaps. Ye'll be thrang puttin' in the seed, nae?"

"Oh, na," replied Sammy, a lanky youth in sleeved waistcoat and corduroy trousers, with much mud on his boots. Somebody had once called him "Saft Sammy" on account of a certain reputed want of intelligence on his part, and the name had stuck, so that he often wished he had been named Tammy instead. "Oo're no' sae far on as that, Mr Peterkin; in fac', we're haein' a plooin' match the day."

"A plooin' match!" cried Peterkin, running his eye over the list of groceries, which made a most satisfactory order. "A fine thing a plooin' match,

and a grand day for't—the sun shinin', an' the grund dry, an' the birds singin'."

Sammy grinned, wondering, perhaps, how the singing of the birds was going to help the success of a ploughing match. But, then, he was wanting in imagination, if not actually in intelligence.

"An' the ham, an' the cheese, an' the canister o' tea'll be for prizes, nae doot. An' the canned beef'll be for the ploomen's denner, an' the four dizzen o' leemonade'll be for them to drink when they come to the end o' a raw. Ye're daein' the thing in style at the Mains, Sammy. Dod, ay. A-weel, I'll see the things is up in guid time, Sammy, tell Mr Wilson. Depend on me. I'm never ahint the fair."

Sammy grinned again and lurched away, and Peterkin looked reflectively out at the door.

A ploughing match brought ploughmen and farmers from far and near. Some of them owed him money. The May term was approaching, when ploughmen changed their places, sometimes forgetting to pay their debts. It was a lovely spring day; business in the shop was not very brisk. He would go to the ploughing match, and perhaps do some business that would make it worth his while.

"Johnny," he called to his little boy, who with fearsome contortions was hoisting his school bag on his back, "run roond by the inn afore ye gang to the schule and tell Willie Manson, the ostler, to bring up the van at aince. I'm for the country the day. Noo see and no' forget."

Johnny departed whistling, well pleased, for he liked to visit the inn stables, where his father's grocery van was kept. Mr Peterkin called to his wife.

"Lizzie, I'm takin' a wee bit country roond the day seein' it's sae fine, an' there's a plooin' match at Fintry Mains. It'll be a grand chance o' haein' a word wi' some o' thae forgetfu' gentry that doesna mind aboot their accounts, and it'll mak' a wee bit jaunt for me forby."

His wife and daughter looked after the drapery and millinery, and were quite capable of managing the whole shop, so Mr Peterkin, having made up the big order for Mains of Fintry, packed the goods into the van when it appeared, doffed his apron, put on his coat, and with a gay flourish of the whip and a blithe good-bye drove off down the village street.

"Sic a he'rtsome day," he observed, returning the salutations of sundry villagers. "Hark till the mavis singin' in the minister's auld hawthorn tree, and the lark awa' up there fillin' the sky wi' music. The wee lambs'll be dancin' in the fields, and a' nature's glad that gloomy winter's noo awa."

Alec Donn, the saddler, and Cunningham, the joiner, were standing together as he passed, and he called out:

"Ay, ye wad like to be me. I'm aff to the Fintry plooin' match; a fine bit jaunt."

They laughed and waved their hands, then separated as though in a hurry to tell some one that Peterkin was off to the ploughing contest.

That worthy man drove over the bridge that spans the Fintry at the village foot, past the church and the school, and climbed the steep brae beyond. Dr Auld in his little grey two-seater passed him with a warning hoot.

"Fine day, Peterkin," he called out. "Ye're early on the road surely?"

"Ay, doctor, they canna dae without you and me for their bodily needs. I'm for the plooin' match at the Mains."

"Right-o!" cried the doctor as he put on speed.

Peterkin drove on, picturing the ploughing match —the horses with glossy, carefully-groomed coats and red, blue, and yellow ribbons tied to their tails and plaited manes; the ploughmen, with smooth-shaven cheeks, looking their smartest; the farmers from far and near, chatting and laughing; an air of joyous good-feeling encircling the scene.

"I declare, the primroses is oot!" he exclaimed as his eye caught the lemon-yellow blossoms peeping from their rosettes of crinkled green leaves under the hedge. "It minds me o' my laddie days when I used to gether muckle bunches o' them. There noo —tak' it canny, Jess; there's nae hurry, lass. We'll get to the plooin' match in guid time."

At Mains of Fintry men were opening out a long potato pit, and putting the potatoes into sacks to send them by motor lorry to the railway station, whence they would go to uphold the reputation of Pickletillie for good, sound, heavy-cropping tubers in distant English counties. Superintending the work was Mains himself—old Robert Wilson, who had held the place for forty years.

"Hullo, Mr Peterkin!" he called. "Where are ye for the day?"

"It's you should ken where I am for, Mr Wilson," replied Peterkin, "an' me come aince errand wi' the

things ye sent Sammy to order for yer plooin' match. Has it no' begun yet ? "

The farmer held up his hands.

" Tchick, tchick ! That stupit eedit, Sammy ! Whatna daft-like mistak' will he mak' next ? The match is no' here ; a' oor plooin' is ower a month ago. It maun be at Laighriggs or Hillend ; they're aye farrer ahint nor hiz. They'll be fell busy there the day."

" Tut, tut ! " said Peterkin. " Sammy's gettin' waur and waur. It'll sune be Daft Sammy instead o' Saft Sammy we'll be ca'in' him. Though, now I come to mind, he didna exactly say the plooin' was at Fintry. I kind o' jumped to that mysel'."

" A-weel, ye'll hae to jump a wee bit farrer, Matthew," laughed the farmer. " The plooin' match'll be bringing ye a fell guid bit o' business, nae ? "

" Och, naething till what's comin' your way, Mains. What are ye gettin' for yer tatties ? Five pound the ton ? Dod, ye micht as weel be howkin' gold ooten the earth."

" It tak's it a' to do, Matthew," said the farmer. " The price o' beasts is down most awfu', and I'm aye feart to ask what barley's drappit till. Na, it's the like o' you that's makin' the fortunes noo, Matthew —aff what us sair-tried folk produces in the sweat o' our broos."

" Sweatin'll dae ye nae herm, Robert," retorted Peterkin, the farmer being decidedly stout. " A-weel, I'll hae to be toddlin' west, or I'll be late for the plooin' match."

Feeling vaguely annoyed, Peterkin drove on. Laighriggs—or Hillend—the one place two miles

farther on, the other three miles after that. Muckersie, of Laighriggs, was a mean, cantankerous person, in little favour with his neighbours—the last man to have a ploughing match on his place. You would as soon expect a harvest home or a barn dance at Laighriggs. No, it must be at Hillend, for Reid, the farmer there, was a jolly, kindly soul.

"Hooever, I'll soon see," he told himself as a trim figure on a bicycle came into sight from the farm road leading to Laighriggs. It was the farmer's pretty niece, Betty, who lived with him and supplied all the brightness of the place. With her blue eyes and yellow curls and the laugh always in her face, she spread sunshine all round. She was a bit of a mischief, too, but perhaps Peterkin didn't know.

"Good morning, Miss Betty," he cried. "I'm bound for a plooin' match the day, and it's either at Laighriggs or Hillend—so they telt me doon at Fintry."

Betty laughed, bringing into play those dimples that had entranced all the lads of the parish, and even caused one to break forth into song in their praise.

"It's not at Laighriggs, Mr Peterkin, I can tell you that. It—it's at Hillend. Yes, of course, it's Hillend —I—I'm sure."

"Thank ye for tellin' me, Miss Betty, and savin' me so much fash. It'll be a box o' chocolates for you the next time you're in the shop. So I'll e'en jog on to Hillend. And hoo's the warld usin' you? Is the big supply o' sweethe'rts aye keepin' up?"

"Oh, Mr Peterkin, and I haven't got even one—not one!"

"Ah, ha—'Nane, they say, hae I, but a' the lads they smile to me when comin' through the rye.'"

" They're a poor lot anyhow," said the damsel, preparing to pedal on.

" They are that," agreed Peterkin, " else you wadna be left on the shelf sae lang. Guid-bye, Miss Betty, and a fine young man to ye when the time comes."

" Good-bye, Mr Peterkin. Hope you'll enjoy the match—when you get to it," and she went off laughing.

Peterkin, now seriously annoyed, drove on to Hillend. To reach that farm he ought to have gone the opposite way altogether—west instead of east round Cathlaw, the hill that stands above the village. Soon he would have completely encircled it, and what a roundabout !

" Dod, this is an unco ferlie ! Sic a lot o' trouble a stupit eedit can gie to busy folk ! " he grumbled. " It maun hae been Reid, o' Hillend, that sent him a' the time. But the puir chiel's no' responsible, I suppose ; he wants a penny, if no' tuppence, o' the shillin'. Hooever, it's a fine jaunt for me——Mercy on us ! " For at that moment a tremendous report shattered the air, causing Jess to jump and the things in the van to rattle. Peterkin in consternation grasped at the seat, then suddenly remembered the quarry sheltered by trees not far off. They were blasting, that was all.

He drove on, waving his hand to the quarrymen trudging back to the scene of operations, from which they had hastily retreated when the explosion was about to come off.

" You lads ken hoo to mak' a noise," he remarked.

" Ay, Mr Peterkin," replied the foreman, " a'body's bound to listen to us when we speak. Are ye for Hillend the day ? "

" Ay—for the plooin' match. I've got the prizes here, likewise the cold meat (frae Chicago) for the men's denner, so it's time I was there."

The quarryman laughed.

" Are ye sure it's Hillend ? Is't no' Mill o' Divot ? "

" It's Hillend," returned Peterkin decidedly. " I'm quite sure o' that."

" Right-o ! But if I was you I wad try Mill o' Divot first."

Peterkin drove on with a curious feeling of uneasiness. Nobody seemed to be certain of anything to-day. However, there was John Malcolm cycling down the road leading from Hillend. He would be sure to know.

" Hey, John ! " he cried. " Has the plooin' match begun ? "

" Oh, you're on the road the day, Matthew ? Has the what begun, are ye speirin' ? " asked Malcolm, dismounting to open the cross-roads letter-box.

" Dinna tell me it's at Mill o' Divot, an' me been at Fintry and Laighriggs seekin' it ! "

The postman bent to examine the letters, then looked up.

" We'll ask Mr Reid ; he's in the field below the wood yonder, where they're busy sheuchin' in the early tatties."

He blew his official whistle, and the farmer came delving across the field.

" Here's the things for yer plooin' match, Mr Reid," said Peterkin, " an' ye may think muckle o' them, for a bonnie habble I've been in deliverin' them."

" Plooin' match ? " said the farmer with an amused look on his jolly face. " Ye're clean aff yer eggs,

Matthew. My plooin's dune lang syne. Mind it's Aprile noo—the First o' Aprile, to be exact."

Peterkin started, and his hand gripped the whip more firmly as a great light dawned upon him. Of course—the famous First ! And after all his boasting, he was nothing but a gowk !

Farmer and postman looked at each other and started to laugh. About the sixth guffaw Peterkin joined in, and, to his credit be it said, his laugh was the loudest.

But despite sundry efforts to that end, he has not yet discovered the author—or authors—of a hoax which kept Pickletillie laughing for many days.

## IX

## THE PICKLETILLIE WEDDING SEASON

"Eh? Umph! Ay?"

"Just that. An' rooberb terts, Maister Tosh——"

"Imphm—rooberb terts——"

"An' we'll want m'rangs an' marzipans."

Peter Tosh, the Pickletillie baker, gasped, and his red face grew redder, like an angry sunset.

"Are ye sure, Mrs Mackay," he asked, in tones intended to convey the most elaborate sarcasm, "that's a' ye would need? Micht I be allowed to suggest apricot turnovers or chocolate biscuits or coconut macaroons—" he paused and looked round his shelves to see if any other rare luxuries might catch his eye, which fell, however, on nothing more remarkable than plump cookies, heavy-looking buns, and succulent currant cakes, known locally as "fly cemeteries."

"We'll tak' some o' each o' thae," responded Mrs Mackay, briskly, Peter's heavy sarcasm being quite lost on her. "Thank ye kindly for mentionin' them. Ye see it's no every day we're haein' a dochter married."

"Are ye aware, Mrs Mackay," asked Peter Tosh, "that there's three weddin's on the go in Pickletillie the noo? That's three bridescakes, each three feet high and three feet roond the bottom: wi' sugar icin' an' flooers an' love knots on them—to say naething o' buns and cakes in endless perfushion. Hoo dae ye think one baker can cope wi' sic an unparrylelled an' multifarious rush o' business?" and he gazed truculently at the hapless Mrs Mackay.

"Oh, weel," replied that lady, in no way daunted by this polysyllabic onslaught, "there's bakers in St Mertouns and Craigport ye ken, but we like to gie our custom to our ain man."

At that moment Chay Tosh, Peter's son, appeared by a winding stair from the bakehouse covered with flour like a white cherub springing from below instead of descending from above.

"We'll manage, father," he cried, cheerfully, "we've never been beat yet; we can work at least twenty-four hours in the day and more when we put ourselves to it—and as Mrs Mackay says, it doesn't happen often."

The wedding season at Pickletillie was unusually busy and brilliant, as the *St Mertouns Gazette* said, no fewer than three brides being led to the altar the same week. The favoured season fell in the autumn rather than in June as in other more conventional places: by October the year's work was pretty well over and that was a fine time, thought these strenuous folk, for settling down to the serious business of life.

Peterkin's drapery and dressmaking department had been working overtime to provide the garments required. It was Peterkin's boast that he could supply everything from the bride's dress and veil to the most intimate items of the trousseau, and each of the brides was tricked out accordingly in garments all made in the village. And for the respective wedding feasts, none of the brides would have thought of going past Peter Tosh, the village baker, who, when taken the right way, and not pushed too much, would furnish capital steak pies for high tea which always followed the ceremony, and fancy bread of wonderful lightness and wide variety.

"We'll do oor best, Mrs Mackay," promised Peter, moved no doubt by that appeal to local patriotism and "bucked up" by his son's cheery optimism. "We'll have your goods ready by Tuesday or perish in the attemp'."

He was interrupted by the ringing of the shop door bell and the entrance of Mrs Mitchell, mother of another of the brides.

"Good evenin', Peter," said that lady, taking no notice of Mrs Mackay, a dangerous rival on this occasion. "I've comed to tell ye we'll need another ten shillin's worth o' shortbreid and half again as mony cookies and buns as we ordered: an', forby, we wad need some extry fine queen cakes an' jam puffs. Ye see we've had word that my friends in Edinburry is comin', an' they're accustomed to havin' everything so nice an' genteel."

Mrs Mackay tossed her head, for the Mitchells' grand friends in Edinburgh—who kept a dairy in Broughton Street—were much too often referred to, and the topic was not popular.

"I'm trustin' to you, Mr Tosh," said Mrs Mackay in very distinct tones, albeit her words, judging by her gaze, seemed to be addressed to a tin of Abernethy biscuits on the top shelf, "my friends do not come from Edinburry, nor do they keep a wee milk shop, but they're most parteec'lar."

Like a prudent young man the white cherub popped down the dark stair, fleeing from the "flytin'" in which he knew his father was quite able to keep his own end up.

"We're quite accustomed to caterin' for the nobeelity an' gentry," said Peter Tosh, taking a note of Mrs Mitchell's amended order, "and it'll no

be—Can we do it weel? but—Can we do it at a'? There's other weddin's gaun on ye ken, mem."

"Indeed," said Mrs Mitchell, untruthfully. "I was not aware——"

"Well, we're quite aware here—but we'll dae oor best, Mrs Mitchell."

"Thank you, Peter. I'm sure ye ken wha's your best customers," and she departed with an air of having left the shop empty of everybody worth mentioning.

"The idea!" said Mrs Mackay. "As if we wasna as guid as her though my man's just a roadman and her's a grieve at Burnhill—an' was just a plooman till a year ago!"

"Ye never ken the gentry but where they are," remarked Peter Tosh, turning to his books, "and even then ye wad sometimes need a thoosand pooer magnifyin' gless to mak' them oot."

Half an hour later, John Cunningham, the joiner, sauntered into the shop, and taking out his snuff-box handed it to Peter Tosh, remarking apologetically:

"Eh—ye ken what weemen is, Peter——"

"Na, John," said the baker, taking a pinch and promptly sneezing, "even Solomon himsel' was bate there, ye ken."

"Weel, what I mean is—they get nervish at special times, an' this weddin' o' oor Bess's on Wednesday is lyin' on the wife's mind, an' naething wad serve her but I maun come an' see you an' mak' sure that a'thing'll be ready in guid time. Ye see," as Peter glared sternly at him, "she kens it's no' the only weddin' an' hoo much ye're run on, Peter——"

"I wish," said the baker, "that weddin' ceremonies was as extinct as Cæsar's ghost: I wish folk just

took each other for better or waur—it's generally waur—an' nae mair aboot it——"

But the expression of Peter's wishes was cut short by the re-entrance of Mrs Mitchell all breathless with hurrying.

"I came to remind ye o' the wee sugar stupids on the top o' the bridescake, Peter: they're a' the fashion the noo."

Peter was speechless, but the joiner said:

"It'll be cupids ye mean, Mrs Mitchell, wee naked feegures wi' wings on their backs."

"Ay—just that: see an' mind them, Peter," and she hurried away again ere the lightning of Peter's indignation could flash forth upon her.

"That's what we've got to stand!" he exclaimed. "How in the name o' guidness can I mak' wee naked sugar feegures wi' wings on them! The wumman's daft!"

"I'se wager ye've dune mair ticklish things nor that in yer day, Peter," said the joiner, who doubtless knew the power of the flattering word. "Yer fame has spread ower the country-side and ye're even named wi' respect in Craigport and St Mertouns. I wish I was as weel kent."

"They a' come to you for their funerals, John," the baker reminded him, "and that's a grand peyin' business."

"Weel, then, I'll awa hame and tell the wife that Peter Tosh & Son are giein' due attention to her order, and a' the things'll be ready, and as guid as they can make them."

Thus put on their mettle, the Toshs', father and son, toiled early and late in an atmosphere misty with floating flour, scented like the winds of Araby with

spices and essences, and hot as a steamer's stokehold. Under their diligent, and by no means unskilful hands, the piles of "fancy bread" grew, and it became evident that the three wedding feasts next week would be duly furnished.

On Tuesday came the wedding of Mysie Mackay, daughter of old Peter Mackay, the parish roadman—County Council official, his wife and daughter called him—to William Stoddart, a small farmer near Craigport. On Wednesday, Bessie Cunningham, the joiner's daughter, was to be joined in wedlock to George Saunders, a "banker" in Edinburgh, and this was to be the grandest wedding of them all, for it was to take place in the church, though envious tongues whispered that "banker" really meant bank clerk at a very moderate salary. Thursday saw the entry into the sacred bonds of Maggie Mitchell and Charlie Cairns, given out by his mother-in-law to be a marine engineer, though afterwards it appeared that his business was to drive the donkey engine.

Of the church wedding the other brides felt secretly envious. Mrs Mitchell said it was just show and uppishness, and Bess Cunningham wasn't making such a great marriage, for the "banker" had only two hundred a year. She wondered why Dr Gillies, the parish minister, had given his consent to the wedding in the church of such unimportant people. But otherwise the thing was popular enough, for it meant decorations and flags and much stir and a ceremony which all could attend and talk about and criticise.

"We're gettin' on grand," remarked Peter to his son on Friday evening, surveying the great array of good things at various stages of progress. "We'll be ready in guid time." (Had Peter been superstitious

he would have touched wood here.) "I was thinking we wad just send the van wi' the things to Mackay's on the Monday an' Cunningham's on Tuesday and Mitchell's on Wednesday—and the thing's dune."

Chay lit a cigarette—much to his father's disgust—and said he thought that was a top-hole plan, quite top-notch, brainy, in fact.

"Say, dad," he remarked, with an airy wave towards the much-blackened ovens, "seems to me that old chimney of ours is getting a bit choked up. I've seen some smoke and soot coming down lately; when was it swept last?"

"The lum's a' richt," said his father, shortly. "I've never kent it gang wrang yet."

But, alas, the "lum's" day must have come: perhaps the excessive firing of the last week had been too much for it, at any rate, just as father and son had gone to bed about two o'clock on Saturday morning, after a long spell of extra work, they were aroused by a faint roaring sound that speedily grew louder and was accompanied by an unmistakable smell of smoke and soot.

The "lum" made quite a beautiful little blaze had anybody been awake to see it, but Pickletillie folk are early bedders and sound sleepers.

Candles in hand, Peter and his son made their way to the bakehouse to behold a horrifying state of matters.

The place was filled with smoke; soot lay thick over everything; the labours of the last week were utterly ruined.

"A-weel," said Peter Tosh at length, in tones of angry resignation, "that pits the lid on it. There'll be nae weddin' feasts here next week so far as we're concerned."

" We'll manage the pies yet," said Chay.

" Never a one," declared his father. " I'm feenished wi' the haill thing. Oor credit's ruined ony wey."

They cleaned away the mess a little and went sadly back to bed. It was a blow from which Peter Tosh & Son would never recover. And like all great catastrophes it had come so unexpectedly.

Morning, however, brought a different mind, and also fresh light and unexpected help.

Just as father and son felt that they must publish news of the disaster and let the customers know they would be disappointed, a smart motor drew up at the door and a smart young man alighted and bustled into the shop.

" How do, Peter ! " he cried, breezily, " and Chay, old sport—still as lively as ever ! But—I say—you look as glum as an old maid at a wedding. Cheerio ! What's wrong ? "

They brightened up a little and shook hands with him. His name was Frank Patterson. Once an apprentice with Peter Tosh, he had gone to Glasgow, worked hard and flourished exceedingly—for industry and ability coupled with opportunity always bring success—and now at an early age he was at the head of a great bakery business with wholesale connections throughout the country.

" How are ye, Frank ? " said Peter, " man, ye're early on the road."

" Been staying with friends up country a bit—and incidentally doing some business—and I'm motoring back to Glasgow to-day, and, as it's a goodish bit, I must make an early start."

Then they told him about the chimney catastrophe and the spoiling of the wedding cakes.

"It'll be the tellin' o' the folk that'll be the sore bit," groaned Peter Tosh, "forby spoilin' their confidence in us."

"I see—you're in a bit of a hole. Well, it's up to me to hoist you out—" He took a business-like note-book from his pocket. "Give me a list of the goods you need and you'll have them by train on Monday and nobody need be a penny the wiser. Bless you, we have a dozen wedding orders every day during the season; we could do this little lot standing on our heads."

So they told him all that was wanted, not forgetting the three wedding cakes.

"And one o' them must have what they ca' cupids on it," said Peter. "Dae you ken what they are, Frank?"

"Perfectly. We make a specialty of cupids on wedding cakes: in fact, we invented them. Well, I must go. I'll send the goods in boxes so that nobody will know what's inside. Depend on me; I'll see you all right and the reputation of Peter Tosh & Son will not suffer," and he shut up his note-book, said good-bye, jumped into his motor and drove off.

The goods came from Glasgow on Monday and Tuesday, and Chay drove them up from the Junction in a van with a tarpaulin over the boxes, so that people would think it was just bags of flour. Meanwhile, the Mackay and Cunningham orders had increased so that father and son had to set to work and make "fancies" for the Mitchell wedding feast, but they easily managed that.

On Friday evening Mrs Mackay came into the shop, beaming.

"Yon was grand cakes an' pies ye sent us, Peter," she said, "an' the weddin' cake couldna hae been

better though it had been made in Edinburgh or Glasgow, folks said. A'body was delighted. Noo, I've come for yer account. It'll be a big ane, I daursay, but we'll no grudge it."

" I—I'm gled ye're pleased, mem," jerked out Peter, while the cherub promptly faded away into the bakehouse.

Then came in John Cunningham, the joiner.

" Man, Peter, we was awfu' weel pleased wi' yer providin' at the weddin'. Dr Gillies in his speech proposin' the health o' the bride and bridegroom said the table couldna hae been better furnished though we had employed a caterer frae Edinburgh or Glasgow ; and the haill thing was a credit to you and to Pickletillie ; so that's a feather in your cap, Peter. Ye should advertise it on yer account paper."

" I—I'm gled yer pleased, John," muttered Peter again.

" Pleased ! we're fair delighted. An' now—aboot yer bill—— "

Then came in Mrs Mitchell.

" Yon was a grand weddin' cake ye made for's, Peter, and the stupids, or whatever ye ca' them, was rale nate and clever. I maun say some o' the cakes wasna just what we expeckit—likes they had been made in a hurry—but we'll no say naething aboot that. Maybe ye can gie me yer accoont. We'll no grudge it, for my Edinbury friends, who are used to the very best, said nae Edinbury baker could hae bate ye, Peter."

" I—I'm gled ye're sae weel pleased," said the unhappy Peter again, " we did oor best."

" You did fair splendid, Peter," said the joiner, " and we'll aye uphaud Pickletillie bakin' against the haill country ! "

## X

## "ARCHIE MEADES"

When Posty arrived at Mill of Divot on his red bicycle one sunny June morning the millwright came to meet him. Wattie Davidson called himself a millwright, though he was really not much more than a country joiner, equal in importance to John Cunningham, of Pickletillie. But he was a pushing, go-ahead fellow, always on the lookout for new ideas and inventions.

"Come awa', Posty," he said. "Man, if ye had a motor bike ye wad be here half an hour sooner."

This was a sore point with Posty, who lived in dread that the Department would one day present him with a motor bicycle, and he did not like the idea of riding such a nerve-shaking machine.

"Hoots, Wattie," he said, "I'm sure yer correspondence reaches ye sune enough. Forby, wi' sae mony stops an' gaun into hooses an' up farm roads, it's dootfu' if a motor bike wad be ony advantage. Mind, it's no' sae very long sin' the postman had to walk roond the parish on his twa feet."

"Ay, but this is the age o' machinery, Posty, an' life's a continual fecht wi' time and space. An' we look to petrol power nowadays instead o' human muscle. Weel, I believe ye'll hae some circulars an' catalogues for me the day. New ideas, Posty. Ye

maun ken what the manufacturers and inventors is daein' if ye want to keep up-to-date."

"Just that," said Posty drily. He did not take the Mill of Divot joiner quite at his own valuation.

"An' that minds me, Posty," went on Wattie, running his eye over the handful of communications Posty had given him. "You that kens a'thing an' a'body, can ye tell me wha was Archie Meades?"

"Eh? Archie—wha did ye say?"

"Archie Meades—that's his name, and he seems to be gey weel kent."

"In what respect?" asked Posty, trying to think if he knew or had heard of anybody of the name.

"Oh, weel, I'm telt there's a new an' improved kind o' screw-nail ca'ed by his name, an' I'm anxious to get haud o't. It seems to hae mony advantages ower the auld strecht-forrit screws, especially for fine work. Ye see, I'm repairing the pulpit in the kirk this summer. It's fair awa' wi't wi' dry rot, an' thae screws wad be the very thing. They dinna split the wud, an' they're no' visible when ye get them in."

"I see," said Posty. "Weel, I'll ask Mr Peterkin when I get doon. He's sure to ken. He kens a'thing."

"A wonderful man, Matthew Peterkin," agreed the millwright. "Splendid brains he has."

"Ay, an' a he'rt as kind as his brain's keen," said Posty warmly. "But I'm sorry to hear aboot the dry rot in the pulpit. I hope it's only the wud an' no' the sermons that's affected."

"Aweel," said Wattie cautiously, "it's only the wud I can put richt onywey."

Posty went on his way in the glorious summer sunshine, glad of the shade of an oak or an elm along the

road now and again, and early in the afternoon got back to Pickletillie.

That evening in the gloaming he strolled into Peterkin's shop.

" When I was up at Mill o' Divot the day," he observed, lighting his pipe and sitting down on the high chair whereon lady customers who wished to be thought genteel sometimes sat, " I was asked a question I couldna answer."

" Say ye so, John ? " returned the grocer, loosening his apron and leaning comfortably over the counter. " That was marvellous. An' what was the poser that fickled ye ? "

" It was Wattie Davison, the wricht—him that ca's himsel' a millwright—he askit——"

" Good evening, Mrs Ramsay," said Peterkin, straightening himself and looking very business-like as the shoemaker's wife entered. " Lovely evening—just delicious."

" There's a nesty raw wind gettin' up the noo," replied Mrs Ramsay peevishly. " It'll sune be cauld an' damp. The auld Scots folk wasna far wrang when they said we never get guid weather till the turn o' the day."

" Hoots, ye mauna misca' oor climate, Mrs Ramsay. Mind, we've had some grand days lately."

" Ay, an' we took off some o' oor winter claes an' got the cauld. Change ne'er a cloot till May be oot, ye ken. Noo, Mr Peterkin, what hae ye got in the wye o' waxcloth ? "

" We hae some grand new patterns, the very latest, an' splendid stuff. Jist look at this, Mrs Ramsay," and going to the back of the shop, he unrolled a length

of linoleum, for Peterkin dealt in a wide variety of things, and prided himself on being able to supply almost anything his customers liked to ask for.

" It's gey bonnie," admitted Mrs Ramsay, " but it'll be a gey bonnie price, too, I'll wager."

Peterkin managed to satisfy her on this point, and she departed, after ordering as much as would cover her kitchen floor.

" She's michty easy pleased the nicht," observed Posty. " She didna even try to prig doon yer price."

" Human natur' is a queer thing, John. Grippy folk is no' aye grippy ; ill-natur'd folk is pleasant whiles ; an', besides," the good man added with a twinkle in his eye, " I happen to ken that she went into a grand upholstery shop in St Mertouns the other day —her man telt me aboot it—an' asked the price o' linoleum there, an' that made her gled to say naething aboot mine. Noo what aboot that question that fickled ye, Posty ? "

" I maun explain," began his friend, but again the explanation was interrupted—this time by the entrance of Maggie Cunningham, the joiner's daughter.

" Ye've come for yer hat, Miss Maggie," said Peterkin, smiling genially. " It's ready for ye, an' it's the bonniest hat ye ever saw. Now what could be nicer nor that ? " and taking the hat from a box, he deftly placed it on her head.

Maggie was a pretty, dark-haired, dark-eyed girl, and the hat of white straw with red ribbon and pink rosebuds really became her remarkably well.

" Come an' see yersel' in the mirror, Miss Maggie," said Peterkin. " Ye're the bonniest sicht it ever saw. Your hat'll be the most fashionable at the kirk on

Sunday," and the delighted girl looked at herself, blushed with pleasure at the sight, and went off enchanted with the hat in its box.

Posty grinned.

"It's you should be at the head o' the millinery department in one o' the big Edinburgh or Glasgow shops, Matthew," he remarked. "Ye've got the wye for it."

"It just needs a little understandin' o' human natur'," explained Peterkin modestly. "An' now what aboot that question, John?"

"Wattie Davison, the joiner, says to me, 'You that kens a'thing, can ye tell me wha Archie Meades was?' I had to confess that I didna ken, but I said I wad ask you."

"Never heard o' him. Is he weel kent?"

"Seemingly, accordin' to Wattie. There's a new patent improved kind o' screw-nail ca'ed efter him."

"He'll be the man that makes it," ventured Peterkin, "but we'll try the encyclopeedy an' see if he's there."

Peterkin got the volume marked "Malt to Pear," and ran through the names of eminent men beginning with "M," but without finding anything like the one of which they were in search.

Just then little Johnny, his twelve-year-old boy, came running in with a request for some oil for his bicycle.

"See here, Johnny," cried his parent, "you that learns algeebry an' general intelligence at the schule, did ye ever hear tell o' a man ca'ed Archie Meades?"

Johnny wrinkled up his face till his small nose could scarcely be seen, then suddenly looked "wise."

" It's Archie Menzies you mean, dad," he blurted. " He's the international half-back—plays for Scotland at all the big cup matches."

Peterkin looked at Posty.

" Think ye that'll be the man ? " he asked.

" Weel," said Posty, " footballers is such great men noo, I wadna wonder gin a new invention micht be named efter one o' them."

" But—a screw-nail, John—it doesna seem very likely."

Posty resumed his pipe, and Peterkin put the encyclopædia away.

" I dinna like to be bate, an' I wadna ask John Cunningham, he's that nesty and sarcastic. But here's the very man. Good evening, Mr Johnston." Mr Johnston was the village schoolmaster, and at sight of him Johnny, who should doubtless have been at his lessons, silently vanished by the back entrance. " An' hoo's the schule getting on, sir ? Ye'll be dune wi' the measles an' the whoopin'-cough an' a' that kind o' thing now ? "

" The attendance is up certainly," said the schoolmaster, " but the time is short, for the summer holidays will soon be here."

" Ah-ha—nine weeks o' learned leisure. You dominies is the boys."

" But we don't make money like you, Mr Peterkin. We're not able to lay up for ourselves treasure on the earth. The root of all evil doesn't grow in the schoolmaster's garden. We pursue knowledge, not wealth."

" Oh, ye're no' that badly off nooadays," said Peterkin, " but we dinna grudge ye yer guid fortune. An' now what can I do for you the nicht, sir ? "

The schoolmaster produced a list of goods required, and Peterkin promised to attend to the order next day.

Then the grocer proceeded to push business.

"Here's some grand new boot polish just put on the market," he said. "Puts a shine on your boots that'll dazzle ye, an' nae trouble to polish. Ye just lay on the stuff an' the polish comes itself. The 'Eureeky,' they ca' it."

"Heureka—meaning 'I've got it'—the classic exclamation of the Syracusan philosopher when he discovered a method of testing the purity of the gold in the King's crown. But what's the connection between boot polish and Archimedes?" asked the schoolmaster.

Peterkin started, and Posty looked interested.

"What did ye say the name was, sir?" asked the former.

"Archimedes, the man who gave vent to the famous exclamation. He was in his bath when the bright idea suddenly occurred to him."

"Had he onything to do wi' screw-nails?" asked Peterkin.

"He invented a screw, but it wasn't a nail. However, I shouldn't wonder if there is a screw-nail called after him."

"I wadna wonder either," said Peterkin.

As soon as the dominie had gone—he duly ordered a tin of the new boot polish—they turned to the encyclopædia again—this time the volume marked "A to Beans"—and soon were learned on the subject of the old philosopher. They were disappointed to learn that he flourished over two thousand years ago, and therefore could not be making screw-nails now.

But light was cast on the problem immediately by the appearance of Johnny with a bill in his hand.

" Is the schoolmaster away ? " he asked cautiously. Then seeing that the coast was clear, he added, " I was over at Willie Cunningham's, and I saw a bill in the shop about—what you were asking about."

His father snatched the paper out of his hand. It was an advertisement of the Archimedes screw-nails, with the maker's name.

" Dod, I ken them ! " cried Peterkin. " I got their circular and price-list the other day. This is simply great."

So next morning Posty took up to the Mill of Divot joiner Peterkin's quotation for supplying the new nails, along with much information about Archimedes, and the result was a big order.

## XI

## THE MARKET GARDENER

ANDREW CUTHBERT,
MARKET GARDENER.
JOBBING DONE. CUT FLOWERS.
VEGETABLES AND FRUIT IN THEIR SEASON.

So ran the sign which John Cunningham, the joiner of Pickletillie, was carefully lettering this fine spring day.

It was a pretty big thing, and John, assisted by his journeyman, Peter Sparks, was doing it on the green in front of his premises. He had brought it out there not only to get more room, but also better light for such delicate work. Also, he was not unwilling to let all Pickletillie know that he had got an important new commission.

"Hulloa, John!" exclaimed Mr Peterkin, pausing on his way to Miss M'Fadyen's to deal personally with a complaint about the freshness of a recent consignment of eggs. "This is a kittle job ye've gotten surely. Wha's Andrew Cuthbert?"

Cunningham stuck a brush into a pot of black paint and took up one from a pot of red.

"Ah—hae—it's a fickle bit o' artistic wark," he remarked, stepping back a little and shading his eyes to observe the effect. "Black an' red on a white grund. Three colours, nae less, Matthew, an' every letter maun be drawn wi' the maist meteeclous exactness."

" Jist that," said Peterkin, making a mental note to turn up " meteeclous " in his dictionary the moment he got home. " But wha's Andrew Cuthbert, gin it's a fair question for to spier? And whaur's he gaun to set up as a market gardener an' jobber, an' supplier o' flowers, fruit, an' vegetables in due season? "

The joiner began carefully to apply the red paint.

" He's a billie frae the other side o' St Mertouns," he explained. " He was a gentleman's gardener, but wants to start on himsel', an' haein' heard o' the fame o' Pickletillie as an enterprisin', intelligent, go-ahead kind o' place, he's gaun to set up in business here. He's taen the field jist opposite you, roond the corner frae Tosh's, an' he's to build a bungaloo—I'm designin' it for him—kitchen, parlour, an' twa bedrooms, wi' a' modern conveniences."

" Gosh," exclaimed Peterkin, rather vexed that all this should have been going on and he had not heard a word of it, " it maun a' hae been arranged quite sudden like."

" I only got the instructions yesterday," the joiner confessed, " an' was telt to push on wi' the signboard."

" Oh, weel, it'll be an improvement to the place nae doot. This'll be a wudden hoose ye'll be gaun to build for him, though? "

" Ay," said the man of wood. " What's wrang wi' that? "

" Oh, naething, only we was brocht up in the belief that there was naething like stane an' lime."

" We're changin' a' that," said the joiner. " Stane an' lime hooses'll sune be as extink as mud hovels."

" I'm no' so sure o' that, John," said the grocer.

" We've built wi' stane an' lime in this country for a guid wheen hunder years—an' 'stane upon stane,' ye ken, John."

" Toots," returned the joiner flippantly. " Plank upon plank'll dae jist as weel."

" I'm feared ye're naething but a Laodicean, John," said Peterkin, who, in addition to being the leading shopkeeper, was also the ruling elder of the parish. " Ye're removin' the ancient landmarks—buildin' a gimcrack hoose o' wud on a foundation o' sand."

" G'wa ! " retorted the joiner. " The Ark was made o' wud, wasn't it, an' the cedars o' Lebanon helped to build the sanctuary at Jeroosalem ? "

" Weel, weel, John "—Peterkin tried to think of a fitting retort, but such missiles don't always come to hand at will—" the wudden hoose'll last oor day onyway."

The next person who came along was John Malcolm, the postman, and his eye was likewise caught by the gaudy sign.

" Ah-ha, Posty—mair wark for ye," cried the joiner. " Another place to tak' letters till. We're extending oor industries in Pickletillie, ye see."

The postman was duly impressed.

" He'll dae reel weel," he remarked ; " gin he has some skill in his trade, that is. Pickletillie's the place for big cabbages, an' monster tatties, an' succulent neeps. We hae the soil an' the climate ; it only needs wark an' brains to mak' the earth yield its increase."

" That's what's needit in every callin'," remarked the joiner, " 'cept maybe the Post Office," he added unkindly.

"Is that a' you ken?" cried Posty. "Man, it's heid wark wi' us a' the time."

"Feet wark, ye mean, Posty," retorted the joiner. "Hoo mony thoosand miles dae ye travel in the year?"

Posty lifted his blue official cap, but finding no inspiration beneath it, went on to attend to the morning's mail, leaving the victory with the man of wood.

Even the Rev. Dr Gillies, the parish minister of Pickletillie, put up his eyeglasses and inspected the sign-board as he passed.

"Ah, John," he remarked, "quite an interesting addition to our native industries. A tiller of the soil, a follower of Adam going to pursue his ancient and most honourable calling in our midst."

"Jist that, sir," said the joiner, stroking his long yellow beard, "but I doot if he's comin' to a Gairden o' Eden. At least, there's a guid wheen thistles an' dockens an' skellies in the field he's taen."

"Eden after the fall, John. You remember it brought forth thorns and thistles. We must welcome this Mr Cuthbert and support his enterprise."

"Oh, ay, sir. Let's hope he'll tak' guid root an' flourish like a green bay tree."

"And bring forth fruit to perfection, John," and the excellent gentleman went on, smiling at his own mild joke.

After that Cunningham and his man, Peter Sparks, held quite a reception on the front green. This suited Peter, who was noted as the slowest person in the parish—slow of speech, slow of thought, slow of action; the very last man, as Peterkin sometimes remarked, to be called "Sparks." To-day he held

the sign-board at the right angle for his master's brush-work, rested frequently, and listened with a blank face to all the comments of the village on this new enterprise.

As for his master, the snuff-box was seldom out of his hand, and his artistic work did not make very rapid progress.

When Peter had relieved him with the paint-brush, David Ramsay, the shoemaker, passed just in time to point out that the assistant was painting an " S " wrong way first, making it like a sign of interrogation. The joiner admitted the error and frowned.

" Mind what ye're aboot, Peter," he admonished. " This is a mair fasteedious job nor blockin' oot a cairtwheel or turnin' a ploo' handle. Ye need to tak' yer brains to this kind o' artistic creation, Peter."

" It's a daftlike ploy, in my opeenion," said the shoemaker. " It'll never pay."

" Toots, I wadna say. Like a'thing else, it jist needs a beginnin', an' ye wad wonder hoo the supply aye creates the demand."

" That doesna apply to buits onyway," returned the shoemaker. " Ye micht hae yer shop filled frae floor to ceilin' wi' them an' no' sell an extra pair."

" That wad depend on the price—an' the quality," returned the joiner, stroking his long yellow beard, and the shoemaker, who was considered rather " dear " by the village folk, went away hurriedly.

John Nicolson, the beadle and sexton, also gave it as his opinion that the new venture would not succeed.

" The grund's no' suitable," he declared.

" Haivers," replied the joiner. " The grund's a'

richt, an' ye mauna think you hae a monopoly o' howkin' an' plantin' in this pairish."

So John Cunningham put in a happy day, rapping everybody on the knuckles, and glorying in the importance conferred upon him by his part in this new enterprise.

But if the joiner was swelling with importance, there were two who felt rather small that day—to wit, Peterkin and Posty. Invariably they knew all that was going on in advance of everybody else, but here was Cunningham, the joiner, before them with this important bit of news. And Cunningham was so much puffed up over it, laughing at them and making game of them before the whole village! It was not to be borne.

At the same time, they must not confess their complete ignorance. So to everybody who came in that day Peterkin told the tidings, adding some features of his own invention.

" This Andrew Cuthbert's a namely gardener," he explained to Mrs Ramsay, the shoemaker's wife. " Tak's first prizes at a' the shows. He'll dae credit to oor parish, and mak' us kent in the horticultooral warld."

When Posty came in with the morning's letters the two exchanged meaning glances.

" Queer sae muckle should be gaun on an' us no' to hear hint nor hair aboot it, John," said Peterkin in very subdued tones.

" Cunningham's crawin' ower us, the nesty buddy," complained Posty. " Did ye ever see him sae sarcastic an' superior, Matthew ? "

" He's got the whup hand this time, ye see, an'

he'll be a big man buildin' a bungaloo—him that never put up mair nor a henhoose or a pigstye afore. But we'll hae to mak' the best o't, John, an' be gled o' the new acquiseetion to the place."

Wherever he went that day Posty spread the news in a boastful sort of way, as though it were his own property, and he had been, as it were, at the birth of the new undertaking. At length he arrived at the "big hoose," and, leaving his red official bicycle in the avenue, sought the gardener's cottage. He found the gardener, Weelum Renton, bedding out violas.

"Ah, ha, Weelum," said Posty, "we're gettin' an eminent member o' your profession in Pickletillie—a market gardener, nae less."

"Say ye so?" remarked Weelum, holding out an earth-encrusted hand for the letters, which were really seedsmen's catalogues. "I'm sorry for a' he'll mak' at that hereabout."

"Oh, I wadna say. Hae ye heard tell o' him—Andrew Cuthbert, frae the other side o' St Mertouns?"

The gardener shook his head.

"Dinna ken him frae Adam. Where's his gairden to be?"

"At the top end o' the place—yon field at the beginnin' o' the Balneuchar road, I'm telt."

"Heh! I doot ye're aff yer eggs this time, John. It's a parcel o' haivers, but we'll sune see," for at that moment the laird, Mr Maitland, came out of one of the glass-houses. Posty touched his hat.

"Posty here tells me, sir," said the gardener, "that there's to be a market garden started in yon laigh field on the Balneuchar road."

"Eh, what? First I've heard of it," said the laird,

" and I would know if anybody did, seeing the field belongs to me. Some joker's been pulling your leg and stuffing your head, Posty," and he laughed and passed on, leaving Posty rather red in the face, as well as greatly puzzled.

" Jist what I telt ye, Posty," said Weelum Renton, going on with his bedding out. " Jist haivers, like a lot mair o' the Pickletillie news. Sic a set ye are doon there ! " And Posty made no response.

On getting back to the village, Posty met Peterkin, and told him what the laird had said.

" D'ye ken, John," said the grocer, laying a hand on Posty's shoulder, " I was jist thinkin' in my ain mind it maun be a hoax. If it had been the first o' April noo—— "

Posty nodded. It was long past the first of April.

" There's John still pentin' away as prood's ye like," he said. " Let's gang an' speak to him—but —michty, if it's jist a make-up ! "

" Grand job this," said the artist as they drew near. " Baith skeel an' taste needit in executin' sic a work of art," and he took out his snuffbox and helped himself to another pinch—about the fiftieth that day.

" I hope ye'll be weel paid for't, John," said Posty.

" Oh, ay ; it'll be paid alang wi' the bungaloo."

" Have ye seen this Andrew Cuthbert, John ? " asked Peterkin.

" No' me. I got the job through my wife's kizzen, Tam Spence. He's a muckle gowk, but he's dune me a guid turn this time. It was him I played a grand hunt-the-gowk on. Tam tries to come it ower me because he has a bit o' land, an' deals in pigs, an' keeps a lot o' hens, so I sent him orders for eggs frae

a dizzen folk. He, he! Tam sent them by post, an' lookit gey tooken doon when they a' cam' back marked 'Not known.' What a lauchin' the wife and me had!"

"Ah-ha," said Posty, "I mind twa or three o' them cam' here."

"It was a guid joke, nae doot," remarked Peterkin, privately thinking it rather ill-natured, however, "but I wadna wonder gin Tam Spence hasna waited till next first o' April for his revenge."

"Eh?" cried the joiner. "Are ye referrin' to this?" and he pointed to the signboard.

"Time will show," returned Peterkin, but, as it speedily turned out, no time was required, for at that moment a smart two-seater with a little, stout, jolly-looking man in it came up the street.

"Gosh! here's Tam Spence himsel'," said the joiner. "He'll tell ye."

The pig-dealer's eye fell on the signboard, and he started to laugh loudly.

"Hullo, John," he said, leaning over from the steering wheel. "Gosh!—what's this you're wastin' your time on?"

"Wastin' my time?" exclaimed the joiner. "Didna you tell me to pent the sign an' design a bungaloo for yer friend, Andrew Cuthbert?"

"Andrew Fiddlesticks! Signboard! Bungaloo! Man, did ye no' see it was jist a baur—a hunt-the-gowk—same as you gied me? Wha wad ever ask you to big a bungaloo!"

Peterkin and Posty walked away, not wishing to hear the joiner's remarks, which promised to be forcible.

"No' the first time the biter's got weel bitten," remarked Peterkin. "I'm thinkin' oor freend'll no' hae sae muckle to say for a guid while, an' he'll speak wi' a less nippy tongue in future. Man, but there'll be a michty lauchin' ower this."

"Imphm!" said Posty, reflecting ruefully that not a few would laugh at him as well as the joiner.

But "laughing" was hardly the word. There resounded a roar from end to end of the parish, the echoes of which have not yet died away.

## XII

## "THERE'S NAE LUCK ABOOT THE HOOSE"

"DASH!"

There was a little crash, and John Malcolm's pipe lay shattered on Mr Peterkin's shop floor.

Peterkin leaned over the grocery counter to see what had happened.

"Pipe gane in twa or three bitties, John," he remarked cheerfully. "Man, ye're in luck! I've jist gotten in a fine selection o' briars this very day—siller-mounted, rale bonnie, an' no' that dear."

"Luck!" echoed the postman. "It maun be luck for you then, Matthew. But I micht hae expected something o' the kind — it's the fifteenth o' the month."

"What has that to dae wi' it, John?" Peterkin turned up the lamp and leaned across the counter. Business was slack at the tea hour. A little later on this Friday evening so near Christmas he was sure there would be a brisk demand for the "Extra Quality Butter," the "Super-Excellent Cheese," and "Fruit to Please the Most Fastidious" he advertised by means of written placards at his shop door. A paraffin lamp in the window and another hanging from the roof shed a mellow light over hams and cheeses, casks of yellow butter, cans of preserved beef and salmon with gaudy labels on them, and bags of

flour and meal. The air was fragrant with the agreeable compounded scents of tea, coffee, oranges, and perhaps even a bag of onions. "I thocht it was jist Friday that was unlucky, mair especially gin it was the thirteenth."

"It's the fifteenth wi' me, Matthew. If I fa' off my bike, or cut my finger, or get stung by a wasp, or break onything, it's as sure to be on the fifteenth as Sabbath begins the week."

"Eh, ye wasna married on the fifteenth, was ye, John?"

The postman stared. "I never thocht o' enquirin', Matthew. I hope no'."

"Tuts, man," chuckled Peterkin, "dinna be sae feared an' sae dooms suppersteetious. Efter fifteen years o' matrimony ye wad ken gin bad luck was comin' to ye as a married man an' heid o' a household. But, man, I'm convinced there's nae sic thing as luck, guid or bad."

The other philosopher shook his head and leaned more comfortably against the drapery counter, whereon Peterkin displayed "Blouses of Beauty," "Correct Corsets," and other garments likely to tempt the feminine shoppers of Pickletillie.

"I'm no sae sure o' that, Matthew. I've seen a hantle unco queer ferlies happen. Forby, there's a wheen gey intelligent folk that believes in luck."

"Imphm! That's so. Mysel' I aince kent a minister that wadna preach in his ain kirk on a Sunday if it was the thirteenth o' the month. He wad hae an exchange. Sic nonsense! A man that had been to the College should hae kent better. Shoo, ye bruit! Get oot! It's that black cat o' Cunningham's keekin'

in at the door wi' its wicked green e'en. I dinna like black cats, John."

The postman smiled.

"Because they're unlucky, Matthew—there ye go."

"That ane's unlucky for my finnan haddies onyway," retorted Peterkin. "Mony a fine pair it's stole. But there's folk that carries their belief in luck to redeeclous lengths, John. If ye let yer walkin'-stick fa' it's no' lucky to lift it yersel'; it's no' lucky to see the new mune through glass; it's no' lucky to be in a company o' thirteen, to spill saut, to break a lookin'-glass, or to kill a spider.

"But it's lucky to find white heather or four-leaved clover, or to pick up a horseshoe, or to be born under Venus or Neptune or some o' thae stars. Folk never seem to think it's lucky to be hard-workin' an' weel-daein', and unlucky to be lazy and ill-daein'."

"Still, Matthew, there's some things ye canna explain or account for."

"Heaps, John," admitted Peterkin cheerfully. "An' here's maybe ane o' them," as at that moment lights showed in the street, there was a clatter of hoofs outside, and a small pony cart drew up at the door.

"Oh, good evening, Mrs. Greig," cried Peterkin to the woman who entered. "A dark nicht for you to drive doon frae Beechknowe surely."

"Ay, but I haena come doon frae the Knowe," replied Mrs. Greig, a hard-working woman, who carried on the farm of the Knowe—or Beechknowe, which was its company name. "I've been ower at St Mertouns at the market tryin' to get a dacent price for my oats, but of course, the price is awa' doon to naething the day that I gang sellin'. There's nae luck for me nooadays."

"Luck!" said Peterkin, glancing across at his friend. "That's just what John an' me's been crackin' aboot. John's a' for luck, guid or bad, but I dinna ken——"

"I believe in't," said Janet Greig bitterly. "I've had naething but bad luck for two years. First there was the accident that took awa' my man; then the horse dee'd; last year my tatties was spiled wi' the rain; this summer the barn gaed on fire wi' the sun shinin' through the skylicht."

"That's a gey queer thing to cause a fire," said the postman.

"Ay, there was a bull's-eye in the pane, an' it was like a burnin' glass, an' set a lowe to the straw—at least, that's hoo I got it explained."

"Imphm," commented Peterkin. "Mair like some tramp had been sleepin' among the straw an' lichtin' his pipe."

"An' noo my oats is no' worth the threshin' oot. I've naething but bad luck, I'm tellin' ye."

"Truly, it's a waesome tale o' dire misfortune, Mrs Greig," said Peterkin with much sympathy, for he knew that it was all true. John Greig, a bonnet laird, owner of some fifty acres in his own right, had brought a large family into the world before departing from it as the result of an accident at the cutting down of a tree on his little property. Truth to tell, John had not been by any means a teetotaller—perhaps Janet's misfortunes had begun further back than she knew—and in a fit of muddlement he had set to work to cut down one of the large and handsome beeches that overhung the little farmhouse and gave the place its name, Beechknowe, at the same time giving it

some added dignity befitting the mansion house of a tiny estate. Somehow the "laird" had taken an ill-will to that particular tree. "It looked sae dooms like a kirk pillar," he used to say, and John, unluckily for himself, no doubt, was no lover of the kirk. But it was only in a frame of mind brought on by a prolonged visit to the village inn that he could bring himself to the task of humbling its pride and getting rid of its accusing presence. Then unskilful work brought the tree down upon him and ended his career, whether of jollity or usefulness. Since then Janet had had to carry on the farm and bring up eight children, no easy task, albeit the farm, if small, was a good one, and the children were healthy, high-spirited, and clever at their school work.

"But tak' he'rt, Mrs Greig," added Peterkin. "The wind willna aye blaw frae the east. The sun o' prosperity'll shine again, an' ye'll be made gled accordin' to the days ye hae been afflictit an' the years wherein ye hae seen evil. An' ye'll mind what anither poet almaist as weel inspired, Rabbie Burns, says:

> "The honest heart that's free frae a'
> Intended fraud or guile,
> However fortune kick the ba'
> Has aye some cause to smile."

"An' yet," said Malcolm, "if a' stories is true, there was ane that made a fortin at the Knowe—that was John's grandfather, Gavin Greig. Savin' Greig, they ca'ed him, he was that thrifty and gear-getherin'—him that had been a sodger in his young days, an' 'listed again an' went to fecht Napoleon, an' was killed at Waterloo. His wealth was never found, though, efter he never cam' back. It had disappeared somehow."

"He had buried it in the grund," said Peterkin shrewdly.

"Something cam' into my heid the other day," remarked Mrs Greig after a pause, during which she had laid on the counter a list of groceries required from Peterkin, "an' I went an' coontit thae trees hingin' ower the hoose, an' dae ye ken hoo mony there is?"

The two men shook their heads.

"Thirteen," she said impressively. "Thirteen."

"D'ye tell me that?" exclaimed Peterkin. "The unlucky number."

"Maybe that explains it a'," commented the postman.

"Aweel, whether or no I'm gaun to hae ane o' them doon—the ane that's hingin' owre the kitchen chimney an' garrin' it smoke."

"I see." Malcolm had been turning it over in his mind. "There was fourteen oreeginally, an' John cuttit doon one an' made the fatal number."

"It's to be fatal for one o' them," said Janet decidedly, "for doon it comes the morn, an' we'll see if that brings me luck. Noo, what are ye gien for eggs the noo, Mr Peterkin?"

The grocer smoothed his apron and assumed a businesslike air of deep calculation.

"Come, noo, Mrs Greig," he said, with a wave of his hand towards Malcolm. "Am I to mention my wholesale price plump oot afore the offeecial news-carrier o' the parish, so to speak? Aweel, if John wasna there we'll say one and ten."

"An' yer price to the public is half a croon," commented the postman.

" Echtpence a dizzen o' profit is no oot o' the way," retorted Peterkin. " I'll maybe hae to put them in a poke, send them ten mile, and tak' the risk o' breakages an' bad debts."

" An' bad eggs," said Malcolm.

" I'll be sendin' doon ten dizzen the morn, then," announced Mrs Greig, pleased with the offer; " an' I'll get thae things at the same time," and she bade them good-night and drove off in the darkness.

" Aweel, I maun be stappin'," remarked the post-man. " I'm wonderin' gin the cuttin' doon o' that tree will bring her guid fortune."

" If she wad tak' an' cut doon them a' an' sell the wood it wad dae her some guid," said Peterkin. " It was on the pint o' my tongue to tell her that, but I kent she wadna listen, for Beechknowe wad jist be an ordinar' ferm placie withoot the beeches."

It chanced that Mr Peterkin's fellow-elder, John Reid, the farmer of Hillend, was laid down with a bad attack of rheumatism, brought on by spending a long day in the rain superintending the lifting of his potatoes, and Peterkin, as in duty bound, went on Saturday afternoon to call upon the sufferer. That person he found in no very resigned or chastened frame of mind. Autumn ploughing had to be seen to, a thrashing mill had to be hired to get his season's oats ready for the market, the Martinmas feeing fair had to be attended—and here he was lying on his back.

" That's the warst o' gettin' the doctor," he growled. " He sends ye to yer bed, an' ' You jist lie there till I come back,' he says. Parcel o' haivers! An' me never a day in my bed onweel in a' my life afore."

And his ruddy, healthy face grew redder with indignation over his grievance.

"Jist that nae," said the unsympathising visitor. "The doctors wadna mak' saut to their kail gin a'body had your iron constitootion, Hillend. Man, ye ocht to be thankfu' the ills oor puir human flesh is heir to hae passed ye by instead o' grumlin' owre a wee indisposeetion like this."

"Humph," grunted the patient. "I'm for up the morn, Dr Auld or no Dr Auld. I'll be oot to see what they're daein'."

"'Deid, ye'll dae naething o' the kind," said his wife, bustling in at that moment. "Hooever, I've made sure—I've lockit a' his claes awa' in the press, Mr Peterkin. No ae fit will he stir oot bye till the doctor says it."

"A maisterfu' move, ma'am," exclaimed Peterkin, while Hillend bellowed like one of his own young bulls in protest against such tyranny. "I see ye're in guid hands, Mains, sae I'll leave ye, jist commendin' to ye the example o' Job in seemilar circumstances."

"No seemilar ava," growled Hillend. "He was weel aff; he had nae Mrs Job to daur him to rise frae his bed."

It was a fine November afternoon, just drawing to the gloaming, and Peterkin walked briskly home, admiring the sombre glory of brown autumnal foliage still on many of the trees, and listening to the blithe piping of the robins, those optimists of the wayside, who grow more cheerful as winter approaches. At Laighriggs they were busy lifting the potatoes. The digger, drawn by two horses, whirled rapidly round like a ship's propeller, making the tubers fly "like

stour afore the wind," as Peterkin remarked to himself. A score of school children, accompanied by some of the ploughmen's wives, lifted them in baskets. The " tattie hairst " is not so picturesque as the reaping of the grain, but the sound, sturdy tubers find a welcome in all parts of the world, and bring much profit to the grower.

Peterkin's way took him past Beechknowe, and on approaching he heard shouts loud and shrill, accompanied by the rasping sound of a saw. The tree that made the kitchen chimney smoke was being cut down by Janet Greig and her ploughman, assisted by a dozen children. Mr Peterkin crossed a stubble field and approached the scene of operations.

" Ah-ha ! ye're carryin' oot yer vow, I see, Mrs Greig," he remarked. " An', dod, ye're no jist cuttin' doon the tree, but tearin' it up by the roots. Mind it doesna fa' on ye, bairns. Get a rope roond it noo an' poo, an' doon it'll come like the wa's o' Jericho."

Perhaps the children did not grasp the Scripture reference, but they understood the rest, and off they flew, with shrill cries, to the barn, and were back in a trice with a strong rope used for rick thatching. Peterkin and the ploughman slung it round a branch of the tree, and they all pulled with a will.

" Noo for the tug-o'-war ! " shouted the enthusiastic elderly gentleman, as eager on this ploy as any of the children. " Pull ! Heave ! Athegither, noo ! Pull ! "

Slowly the tree gave way. Bit by bit it lessened its hold of the ground it had been wedded to and nourished by for a hundred years ; then with a final strong pull they had it lying prone on the earth.

" Hurray ! " cried Peterkin, leading the cheers.

"This'll keep ye in firewood for mony a day, Mrs Greig, as weel as let yer kitchen lum draw in peace. My certie, what roots it's got! Look at thae."

He poked his stick into the soft ground among the broken roots. It came against something hard. He poked again, and there was a metallic sound. The stick had struck upon iron. Something square and massive showed dimly under the thin coating of earth.

"I say, Mrs Greig!" he exclaimed.

"What's gaun wrang?" asked Janet characteristically—things so often went wrong with her.

"Naething. Ane o' you bairns run for a spade—quick."

"What for? Dae ye want to howk up the roots?"

"No. I'm thinkin' it'll be the root o' a' evil I'll be howkin' up"—his mind instantly running on buried treasure, often hidden at tree roots in days of old.

One of the girls had rushed off for a spade—they would do anything for this jolly, grey-haired man who shouted and played with them just like a boy—and Peterkin took it and began to dig.

It did not need much work with the spade to bring to light a square iron box, much rusted, but unbroken, and just as though it had not been lodged a century underground—for that soon proved to be its history. The box was heavy, and rattled.

"Miser Greig's treasure, as I'm a leevin' soul!" exclaimed Peterkin. "Buried here when he gaed awa' to the war, and howkit up jist in time to be a blessin' to you, Mrs Greig. Ye'll be rich the day."

And so it turned out, for the box, on being opened, was found to contain five hundred golden pieces of the reign of George the Third. Accompanying papers

showed that the hoard had belonged to Gavin Greig of Beechknowe, so the widow had no difficulty in laying claim to it.

Janet Greig's troubles were over. Her bad luck had lifted at last.

## XIII

## PICKLETILLIE BOYS

### A DAY'S ADVENTURES

"CAN I go a picnic to-morrow, dad?" said little Johnnie Peterkin to his respected and often long-suffering parent one Friday evening.

Johnnie was seated luxuriously, though it might have been thought a little uncomfortably, on the edge of a barrel of apples. The apples were large, red, and fragrant, and the barrel bore in big red letters, "Packed by Hiram K. Moosgee, Company, Red River, Ontorey, California." What a splendid thing to inflame the imagination of a boy, bringing before his vision the glorious Wild West, with its prairies, its boundless forests wherein prowled 'possums, wolves, and bears, where redskins still had their wigwams, and wild, adventurous men lived mostly by spearing salmon in the great rivers. Not far off were boxes of raisins and currants from Greece, bananas from the Canary Islands, dates from Mesopotamia, and finnan haddies from Aberdeen. There were jars of sweets, too—acid drops, peppermint balls, fruit lozenges, toffee, butter scotch, and dozens of other sorts. Add to these the fragrant spices and boxes of tea and bags of coffee, and who could be happier than a small boy in a grocer's shop?

" A picnic, Johnnie," said his father, who, with apron rolled up and spectacles on nose, was busy making out accounts at a little desk behind the counter. " Ay—Mrs Thomson—Johnnie, hoo much is nine an' fourpence ha'penny an' six an' ninepence ? "

" Sixteen and a penny halfpenny," replied Johnnie without hesitation, for " mental arithmetic " was very thoroughly taught at Pickletillie school.

" Right ! " said his father after carefully verifying the answer on paper. " Ye're a grand coonter. We'll hae to mak' ye an accountant when ye grow up. That's a fine, weel-paid job nowadays. An' where are ye gaun to picnic ? "

" At Rosehill Wood, and Willie Cunningham and Alick Thomson are going, too. Maggie Thomson and Jeanie Cunningham wanted to come, but we didn't want them."

" Of course no'," laughed his father. " Ye're no' the age yet, laddie. Jist you bide a wee, an' ye'll be priggin' on Maggie an' Jeanie to gang wi' ye. Ah-hae ! " and he looked reflectively into the street, thinking, no doubt, of his own youthful picnicking days.

" Huh ! " scoffed Johnnie. " There's never any fun where there's lassies. Besides, lassies quarrel an' boys don't."

" Ye're a regular philosopher, sir," exclaimed his parent. " Ye're weel up in the peculiarities o' the fair sex. Does yer mither ken aboot the picnic ? "

" No," said Johnnie, " but it'll be all right," meaning, no doubt, that if he got his father's permission and approval his mother's would follow automatically —or wouldn't matter.

"I mind the day when I used to gang to picnics mysel', laddie, though it's funny, when ye can hae yer tea in comfort sittin' at a table, ye maun travel ten mile to tak' it sprawlin' on the damp grass, wi' yae elbow in the strawberry jam an' the ither in the butter, an' flees drappin' into the tea, an' wasps buzzin' around, an' the water smoked ower a stick fire, an' the sugar forgotten, an' only yae teaspoon to six cups. Ay—but if there was some bonnie lassies there ye dinna mind."

"And, dad," pursued Johnnie, coming to the point and cutting short this stream of unprofitable reminiscence, "can we have some apples, an' dates, an' raisins, an' biscuits, an' oranges?"

"It's gaun to be a vegetarian affair, I see," said his father. "Aweel, you be a guid laddie an' help yer mither a' ye can, an' we'll see what we can gie ye the morn."

Johnnie, like a wise boy, said no more. Schemes far more important than a boy's picnic have been ruined before now by an unnecessary word.

At ten next morning the three met at the bridge that spans the river at the foot of Pickletillie's long, winding street. Johnnie carried a basket whereat the others looked approvingly. They likewise had large parcels bulging with eatables, for their mothers knew the size of Pickletillie's boys' appetites.

Not a word did they speak till they had crossed the bridge, then—for it is well known that running water has the power of changing you into something else—they addressed each other by new names.

"Hail, brave Blue Panther," said Johnnie Peterkin to Willie Cunningham.

" Hail, brave Red Buffalo." So he addressed Alick Thomson.

" Hail, Great White Chief," replied the other two together.

" Our wigwam is now consti-ti-tutioned," announced the Great White Chief solemnly.

Panthers are probably not blue, nor buffaloes red, and wigwams are not " constituted " thus, but that did not matter to the three braves now wandering over the wide world in search of adventures.

Adventures are to the adventurous, and three small boys—especially if they bear names redolent of the prairies and the wild North-West—may meet a good many in a forenoon even in a quiet rural parish.

As they trudged along they chattered about boys' interests—foreign stamp collecting, cigarette cards, birds' nests.

" I ken a speug's an' five," said Blue Panther.

" But I ken a blackie's an' fower," rejoined Red Buffalo.

" Hush, braves," said the Great White Chief. " What strange four-footed animal do we see on the road before us ? "

The " four-footed animal " with long ears and a shaggy grey coat was easily identified.

" It's Tam Lowson's cuddie," said Blue Panther. " It shouldna be on the road—it's against the law."

The donkey stood looking wistfully over a gate at a field of rich grass and juicy clover that stretched between the road and the river. Both grass and clover were at their sappiest, and just ready to be cut and turned into hay.

" Puir beast, it's half-starved," said Red Buffalo.

"It is our duty to be kind to animals," announced the Great White Chief. "S'pose we let the cuddie into the field."

"Agreed!" said the two braves, though Red Buffalo added cautiously, "Just for a wee while, of course."

"Besides, it's against the law to hae it on the road," said Blue Panther, vaguely feeling that this consideration legalised what they were going to do.

So they opened the gate, and Tam Lowson's half-starved donkey immediately sprang in with the feelings, no doubt, of a tramp entering a well-stocked restaurant and told to help himself. He buried his head in the rich grass and delicious scented clover, and munched and munched. Not for years had he enjoyed such a feed. The boys stood and watched him with a kindly look on their faces. It made them feel good, somehow, thus to show kindness to the lower animals.

All would have gone well had not the donkey—like the donkey he was—suddenly lifted his head, laid back his ears, opened his mouth, and given vent to his delight in a hee-haw that must have been heard for miles.

It was heard, at anyrate, by a man who was fishing down at the river. He hastily threw away his rod and came flying across the field, uttering shouts of rage.

"'Tis the farmer," announced the Great White Chief with true Red Indian calm. "Let us vamoose."

So they "vamoosed," and did not stop running till they had put nearly a mile between them and the scene of their exploit.

"Halt!" panted the Great White Chief. "'Tis

enough. Red Buffalo, do thou climb yonder tree and see whether the enemy still pursues."

After climbing the tree—a stunted hawthorn by the wayside, whose spurs did some damage to his garments—and gazing over the landscape, Red Buffalo reported that there was no sign of the pursuer. So they sauntered happily onwards in hope of more adventures.

The road soon brought them to a blacksmith's forge, a place which always draws boys like a magnet. They gazed in at the open door. There was nobody about. Plough coulters, horseshoes, and lots of iron things lay on the floor. The great fire burned low.

" See the bellows," said Great White Chief. " S'pose we try to blow it up."

All three seized the handle, and with much difficulty pulled it down, and shoved it up, and made the giant bellows contract and expand. Its stout leather sides quivered and bulged and raised such a breeze as soon made the fire blaze merrily.

" See here," observed Blue Panther, " what's the good of making the fire roar if there's no iron heating in it ? "

The question appealed to the other braves.

" Let's chuck some iron things into it," said Red Buffalo.

So they placed in the flames two horseshoes, a plough coulter, the hub of a cart-wheel, and the revolving knives of a lawn mower, as well as several nameless pieces of iron. Then they plied the bellows again with hearty goodwill.

How delicious it was to hear the fire roaring and to see the sparks fly and the flames rush up the

great, wide chimney! Why, the sparks were cascading at the top like fireworks, and a trail of black smoke spread over the landscape! Never had Netherburn smithy been worked so briskly before.

The iron implements were soon all red-hot and glowing.

"How much obliged the blacksmith will be to us for doing his work," said the Great White Chief, pausing to wipe the sweat from his face with a grimy handkerchief. "He'll maybe give us something when he comes back."

The blacksmith of Netherburn, his week's work done, had gone up the hill to a farm to see a sick cow, for he was very "skilly" in the treatment of animals. Having prescribed for the cow, and given it as his opinion that she would soon be restored to her usual state of placid good health, he sauntered down again, accompanied by the farmer.

"I'm muckle obleeged to ye," said his friend, "for yer time an' yer skeel."

"My skeel's as it maybe," returned the blacksmith modestly. "As for my time, my week's wark's a' by, an' I'm jist lettin' things cool aff."

"Faix, but you're no' doin' that," said the farmer, pointing to the fiery sparks and broad trail of black smoke issuing from the smithy chimney. "Yer fire's lowin' like Mount Vesoovius."

"Great Jehoshaphat!" cried the smith, and started to run. What in the name of all the anvils that ever were cast could have made the forge go like that? On coming nearer he solved the problem, and seizing a big stick, made even more rapidly for the scene of the outrage.

The Great White Chief was the first to see him, and judging by the look of rage on his face and the way he flourished his stick, concluded that if he was going to "give them something," it would be something they would not greatly like. So he passed the word to run. At the back of the smithy was an unglazed window, and through this the three disappeared just as the smith reached it, and once more they ran for their lives.

Breathless, but happy, they sank down by the roadside, and looked back at the smoke still darkening the sky. The pleased expression on their faces said, "Alone we did it." But suddenly the Great White Chief remembered, and cried, "Our picnic things! We've left them at the smithy!"

Consternation! All the fine things they had brought to eat!

"Let's do a scout," suggested Red Buffalo, "and see if we can't retrieve our grub."

They climbed up the hill and looked down on the smithy. The smith and some others were busy redding up. As they looked the door was shut and locked. No hope there.

"'Twould be too dangerous to go back, I fear," said the Great White Chief sadly.

"But see yonder!" cried Blue Panther, pointing along the road.

Down below two girls were walking briskly along, carrying between them a large basket. They were Maggie Thomson and Jeanie Cunningham, sister of Red Buffalo and Blue Panther respectively.

"Having a picnic of their own, you bet, when we wouldn't let them come with us. Let's follow them and see," said Great White Chief.

With much caution they kept behind the girls, who soon left the main road and took the winding path that led to Rosehill Wood. Going to the highest point where brackens grew, they hid their basket and disappeared.

"They're off to the river to wade," guessed the Great White Chief, and climbing up, they saw the girls on the river bank below. After dipping their hands in the water and making up their minds it was not too cold, the girls began to take off their shoes and stockings.

"Come on and see what's in the basket," said Great White Chief.

"Of course we'll just look," said Red Buffalo virtuously.

"Certainly," said Blue Panther, still more virtuously.

The basket when they approached it smelt like a baker's shop. It contained four of Peter Tosh's meat pies, several rhubarb tarts, biscuits, cookies, apples, oranges, and sweets.

"The greedy little pigs!" exclaimed Great White Chief. "Were they going to eat all that?"

"It wouldn't be right to let them," said Red Buffalo.

"Course it wouldn't," agreed Blue Panther.

Three hungry boys could not be expected to stand and merely admire these good things and enjoy the smell of them. Let it not be thought extraordinary, then, that forthwith they sat down amid the bracken and consumed the meat pies. The rhubarb tarts followed, then a few biscuits and cookies. For music to brighten their meal they had the merry laughter and joyous shouts of two light-hearted, unsuspecting

maidens wading in the river below. At length these pleasing sounds ceased.

" They're coming back," whispered Great White Chief. " Let us retire."

So they replaced the basket and " retired," and, wriggling through the bracken, gained the river by a roundabout path. Here, much refreshed by their lunch, they, too, waded and splashed and threw stones. Nor were they greatly disturbed by faint, shrill cries of rage that reached their ears, and by the sight of two girls in the distance threateningly waving their arms. Fortunately their remarks—doubtless of an uncomplimentary character—did not reach.

" These girls again," said Great White Chief. " I vote we treat them with silent disdain."

Wading across the river, they suddenly found themselves in the midst of a poultry farm. There seemed to be hundreds and hundreds of hens of every colour —black, white, grey, yellow—and of all sizes, each kind in a neat little fowl-house of its own. Obviously they would rather be outside roaming the fields than confined within these squares of wire netting. The Leghorns stretched their necks through the wires and gazed longingly at the buff Orpingtons opposite, as though their chief desire in life was to fraternise with their fellow-prisoners. Cocks of different breeds and colours threw shrill greetings to each other.

" I wonder what would happen if they got out ? " remarked Blue Panther.

" S'pose we see," said Red Buffalo, and the Great White Chief raising no objection—for there seemed to be nobody about—they opened the doors of the Leghorn and buff Orpington houses, and instantly

the white and yellow hens streamed out and began delightedly to greet each other in hen language. The cocks, after stretching their necks and uttering a few defiant crows, flew at each other in gallant fashion. Hens cackled loudly, and several cocks in other houses started to crow, wishing, no doubt, that they were in the scrimmage.

" The yellow one'll win," said Great White Chief. " My, just can't they fight ! "

Bending over a hen-coop, they regarded the struggle with great interest, occasionally uttering cries to encourage a white or a yellow brave. But suddenly a sharp swishing noise was heard above the din, and Blue Panther jumped up with a yell. Looking round in surprise, they beheld a hefty-looking young woman in what seemed to be male attire, armed with a stout stick, which she had just wielded with some effect.

" What business had you to let the hens out ? " she cried. " I'll learn ye—— "

But the braves did not think it expedient to wait for the proposed education. They fled.

" We'll go home by the fields," said the Great White Chief when they had put the river between them and the irate poultry farmer.

" We'll maybe see Saunders's bull," said Red Buffalo hopefully. " It's a rare wild one."

So with this inspiring thought in their minds, they entered Saunders's field and looked round for the bull, a great black Aberdeen-Angus of pure breed, and a prize-winner at many cattle shows. There he was, away in a corner, busily cropping the grass. With his head steadily lowered he took no notice of the intruders.

" We'll just walk across the field to yon gate," said Great White Chief in a whisper.

" We'll see if he'll come after us," remarked Blue Panther, with a fearful look round at the bull.

" Of course we'll not hurry," said Red Buffalo bravely.

In the middle of the field was a deep pool from which the cattle drank. To prevent accidents the water at its deep part was protected by a broad wooden cover. Here minnows and tadpoles were to be found, and just to have a look at these curiosities the boys dragged off the heavy cover. While they were peering with much interest into the water and trying to catch some of the minnows that darted about like small shadows, a warning sound reached their ears, and looking hastily round, they found the bull charging down upon them.

Instantly they jumped up and started to run. Oh, my—what a long way it was to the gate !

The bull, rushing madly after his prey, failed to see the obstruction in front, and with a mighty splash went right into the pool. His furious kicking, struggling, and bellowing reached the fleeing braves, who stopped and looked round at the antics of their enemy in much delight. No need to hurry now. But next moment they changed their minds, for two farm servants armed with hayforks came running from opposite sides of the field, shouting wildly as they ran. This boded no good to the braves, who once more took to flight. When they thought it safe to stop running they were almost at the village.

" Hasn't it been a topping day ! " panted the Great White Chief.

" Ai," agreed Red Buffalo.

" Perfectly scrumptious," chimed in Blue Panther,

They then solemnly " unwigwammed " themselves, and Johnnie Peterkin, Willie Cunningham, and Alick Thomson went home three tired but happy boys.

## XIV

## THE OLD ARMCHAIR

"NEW season's reuburb." John Malcolm, the postman (this was before he was made Postmaster), noticed the card which Mr Peterkin had just stuck up in his window as Posty wheeled up his official bicycle on starting his morning round. He smiled a little, then frowned. As a friend of Pickletillie's only grocer, he must point this out. There was still time, for the schoolboys, most merciless of critics and greatest of gossips, had not yet begun to pass on their way to school. But how? Surely here was one of those Problems of Conduct which give so much trouble in this world.

"Some bits o' things for you the day as usual, Matthew," he remarked, laying a handful on the counter between a Dutch cheese and a box of Lochfyne kippers. "You're the biggest customer o' the Post Office in this parish."

"Ay," said Peterkin as he glanced over the letters, "there'll be nane o' them announcin' a legacy, or a Knighthood, or an LL.D. comin' my way, I'll bet ye, Posty. Na—gosh me, if this isna the county rates again! They're aye turnin' up when they're no wanted, like bawbees in the kirk plate. It'll be the usual extortion, I suppose. Ay, listen to this. Upkeep of roads, sixpence a pound. What do they do

for the roads, John? Did ye ever see sic a mess o' glaur as oor roads hae been this winter? They minded ye o' Bunyan's Slough o' Despond. Police, threepence in the pound, an' yet they couldna find oot wha stole the finnan haddies frae my door last October. Drainage, fourpence a pound. What do they drain except the siller ooten oor pooches? Lighting—an' the only licht oor roads ever get is frae the sun by day and the moon by nicht. Water—it draps on us frae the heavens for naething. Lunacy—ay, they do weel to charge for that; their ineequitous exactions is eneuch to drive us a' mad."

"The county affairs must be managed and paid for," said Malcolm, who as a Government servant was minded to stand up for fellow-officials. "By the way, can ye tell me hoo to spell roomatism, Matthew?"

Peterkin screwed up his features.

"Ye havena got a spell o' it, hae ye, Posty?"

"No, but Elspeth Maclauchlan, the wifie at the Laighriggs cottar hoose, has, an' as like as no she'll be asking me to write a postcard to her dochter in Glasgow tellin' hoo she is, an' that word aye bothers me."

"Dod, it's a nesty, pesky, fykie kind o' word," said Peterkin, "but Johnny's schule dictionary's lying ben the hoose; it'll gie ye the richt spellin' in twa waves o' pussy's tail."

He brought the book, which Posty immediately took and began to turn over the leaves.

"There's a wheen bothersome words like c-o-m-i-t-t-e-e.—Aye mind the twa t's an' the twa e's, John. An' a-c-c-o-m-o-d-a-t-i-o-n. Mind the twa c's," said the excellent grocer. "An' there's e-d-d-i-f-y an'——"

" Ay — r-h-u—— Here's a well-kent freend— r-h-u-b-a-r-b——"

" Eh ? " exclaimed Peterkin sharply.

" R-h-u-b-a-r-b, from the Latin rhubarbarum."

" Jist that," interrupted Peterkin, making a hasty dive into the window and taking down the placard, dislodging a bottle of peppermints in his hurry. " It's a fine, healthy thing, rooburb."

" An' here's roomatism," announced Posty. " I'm a' ready for the wifie at the Laighriggs cottar hoose noo. R-h-e-u-m-a-t-i-s-m. I'll need to say that a' the way to mind it."

He handed back the dictionary, hitched up his bag, and prepared to depart, not without a smile as he saw the placard lying on the floor.

As Posty turned to go and resume the delivery of His Majesty's mails a smart two-seater drew up at the door, and from it alighted a small dark gentleman, very beautifully dressed.

" Good morning," he said affably, eyeing both Peterkin and Posty and embracing both in his greeting. " This is my name," and he handed Peterkin a card on which was printed " Malcolm Anderson " and an address in a leading city. " I'm spending a spring holiday at St Mertouns, golfing mostly, and motoring through your charming country, and when I came to this most delightful village I thought I would alight to view its beauties more closely, and perhaps to make the acquaintance of some of its leading and most intelligent inhabitants."

Peterkin's face beamed.

" Ye did quite richt, sir," he said. " Ye showed yersel' to be a gentleman o' guid taste and guid

sense." Praise of his beloved village always delighted Peterkin.

" May I ask the name of this charming place ? "

" Pickletillie, sir. I'll spell it till ye."

" How odd. Thank you."

" There's no' anither place o' the same name in the haill country—indeed, I may say in the haill warld, sir."

" Indeed ! How interesting ! Then I have landed on a unique spot to-day."

" There's no' a un-eeq-uer, sir. Pickletillie stands quite by its lane. We bate a' for energy and enterprise and general intelligence."

" I'm quite sure it is so, and I count myself fortunate in having dropped in here to-day," and he looked at Mr Peterkin with an expression which intimated that in him he beheld the embodiment and quintessence of Pickletillie's energy, enterprise, and intelligence. " This is really delightful. Now I may say that my —er—hobby—or one of my hobbies—is antiques—old furniture, you know. Why, I spend all my—er—my pocket money on old chairs and tables you wouldn't give twopence for. Now I understand that in some of your country cottages, where the family have lived for generations, there are often old bits of furniture the owner would be very glad to sell. May I ask if you know of any one who has an old chair, or a table, or a meal girnal he or she would like to dispose of ? "

A slight change came over the expression on Peterkin's face.

" I see, sir," he said heartily. " You're a collector——"

"In a very trifling way, of course," put in the stranger hastily.

"An' hae ye been successful in collectin' anything so far?"

The lover of antiques gave him a keen look.

"Oh, no," he said. "It's wonderful how little good old stuff there is left, and real treasures are very few and far between, but I live in hope."

"Capital, sir," said Peterkin still more heartily, while Posty looked at him curiously, wondering what he was driving at. "As oor Robbie says, 'Hope springs exulting on triumphant wings.' But ye'll maybe no' ken oor national bard, sir?"

"No," said Mr Anderson indifferently, then suddenly caught himself up. "Why, of course, what am I thinking of? The great, immortal—eh—Mr Robbie."

"Jist that," said Peterkin innocently. "Ye'll mind his lines?—

> "Hope, like the gleaming taper's light,
> Adorns and cheers oor way,
> And still as darker grows the night
> Emits a brighter ray."

"Of course—grand poet, Robbie."

Posty grinned. What sort of a rag was this of Peterkin's?

"As a true Scot ye'll be interested in oor poetry and oor noble national history, Mr Anderson. 'Scots Wha Hae' and all the rest?"

"Oh, very much so, indeed," said Anderson, looking a little bored nevertheless. "An' there's our parritch and our carritch and—er—other things."

"Exactly, sir. It's grand to be a true tartan-bluided Scot."

The other looked at him a little suspiciously, but Peterkin's face was as innocent as a child's.

" Ha, ha—good expression that. But to return to the subject of our conversation, can you tell me of any one who has good old furniture he would like to get rid of ? "

" I'm mindin'," said Posty, " that Mrs Maclauchlan at the Laighriggs cottar hoose has an auld armchair that belonged to her great-grandfather or grand-auntie. It has queer, twisted, spindly arms and a carved back like a fan."

" Ah, Chippendale," muttered the stranger under his breath. " A hundred and fifty years old perhaps —just the right period. A chair like that, my good man," he said aloud, " is of little value nowadays. It's hardly worth my while looking at it."

" That's a peety," said Posty," for Mrs Maclauchlan's got the roomatics, an' she canna work, an' I'm feared she's gey ill-aff, puir body."

" Ah, that makes a difference," said the lover of antiques readily. " I will go and see the chair, and perhaps give her something for it as a matter of charity—if she wishes to dispose of it, that is. Where does this Mrs Mac—eh—live ? "

" I'll show ye, sir," said Posty. " It's just three mile frae here, an' if ye gang slow in yer motor I'll no' be very far ahint ye on my bike, even allooin' for stops by the way."

" That's very kind of you," said the stranger. " When shall we start ? "

" It's very kind o' you," remarked Peterkin, trying to catch the postman's eye and failing, for Malcolm, realising that he had delayed the delivery of the letters

long enough already, had turned to the door, anxious to be off, " to gie the puir auld body a guid price for an auld bit o' furniture that's likely only fit for firewood."

The stranger laughed, showing two rows of perfect teeth beneath his little black moustache, and went out to his motor, and he and Posty started off.

It must have been rather laughable to any one who saw them on the road that morning. The motor had to keep pace with the push bike, and John had to stop and deliver letters at almost every cottage and farmhouse, and whenever he stopped the motor stopped too.

" Simple old codger that grocery man," the motorist remarked at one of these halts. " Talks a lot of tommy rot about poetry and stuff like that, don't he ?"

And he looked at Posty as much as to say, " And you're another rustic simpleton."

" Matthew has a lot to say when he likes, I'll admit," said Posty, " but he's no' sae green an' far back as ye wad think. But here's the Laighriggs ; we'll sune be there noo."

" Thank goodness ! " said the motorist, who had not enjoyed the slow journey.

Meanwhile Mr Peterkin had fallen a prey to very uneasy feelings regarding the matter. He felt sure that the man was an impostor, a Jewish dealer masquerading under a Scottish name, going about the country buying up valuable old furniture and antiques, taking advantage of the owners' ignorance of their value, and giving the lowest prices for them. Peterkin knew Elspeth Maclauchlan well. He knew what a struggle she had had since her husband, the grieve at Laighriggs, died ; how she had striven to support herself by outdoor work, until, crippled by rheumatism,

she had to give in. He had heard her tell of a grand-aunt who had been lady's-maid in a family living in Chelsea, and had been presented by them with keep-sakes of old furniture and china. These had been left to Elspeth, and Peterkin had seen them on visits to her cottage, but it had never occurred to him that they were of any value.

At his dinner hour Peterkin turned up an encyclopædia of which he was very proud, and soon became learned on the subject of Chippendale furniture and Chelsea china. He was roused from his researches by the sound of a motor horn, and, hurrying down, found the lover of antiques striding into the shop as though it belonged to him.

"Well," he announced, "I've given the old girl thirty bob for her armchair, but there's some old china I'd rather like. Offered her two pounds for the lot, but the obstinate old mule said she wouldn't sell them until she had consulted you. Know anything about old china?"

Peterkin's face lit up, but he shook his head.

"No—no muckle," he said.

"Well, then, what's the use? But I'm to go back at seven to-night to get the chair, and I'll see about the china then."

"I'll be there, sir," said Peterkin readily, "and try to persuade her for her ain guid, for she's sair needin' the siller."

"I'll maybe go the length of five pounds for the china, just as an act of charity, you know, though charity doesn't do in business."

Peterkin noted how he had given up his pretence of being an amateur collector out on holiday.

" Oh, as lang's I mind," he remarked, " did Elspeth gie ye a receipt for the thirty shillin's ? "

" Why, no ; but what does it matter ? " asked the other, surprised.

" She should hae gien ye a receipt. It's yer title to the chair. Just write out ane the now, and I'll get her to sign it."

Anderson, if that was his name, smiled contemptuously, but took the pen which Peterkin handed to him and a sheet of the grocer's account paper and began to write.

" Hoo will ye describe the chair ? " asked Peterkin innocently. " Ca' it Scotch-made ? "

" Yes, that'll do as well as anything else. Scotch-made armchair, by some clumsy village joiner. There, you can get her to sign that since you are so idiotically particular, and I'll be at the place at seven sharp to complete the transaction," and he strode away and sprang into his motor, leaving Peterkin looking after him with a beaming face.

" I've got him noo," he chuckled.

At six o'clock Peterkin set out through the pleasant spring dusk towards the farm of Laighriggs, which lay at the foot of the hills about three miles from the village. Sundry acquaintances greeted him, and he responded with remarks about the fineness of the spring weather, the favourable sowing time, and the excellent prospects of the lambs. Elspeth Maclauchlan was very glad to see him when he appeared at the Laighriggs cottar house.

" Weel, Elspeth, woman," he said, " an' hoo's the roomatiz the nicht ? Life's a trauchle whiles, but there's brichter days dawnin' for you if I'm no' sair

mista'en. I'll sit in the fine auld armchair ye hae selt to that birkie the day, and I'll tak' a look at yer cheeny, if ye please."

He carefully inspected the china—two beautifully-moulded vases—and noted the delicate green tint, the heavy gilding, and especially the anchor, cross, and diamond, which attest the genuineness of this ware. (See Encyclopædia !)

" Oor family has had thae for mair nor a hunder year," said Elspeth proudly, " and I'm sweer to part wi' them. But, still an' on, if they're worth some siller——"

" Ay, are they, Elspeth. The makin' o' them stoppit a hunder an' fifty year ago, an' they're as scarce as bramble berries in March. We'll get a big price for them. But here's the birkie. We'll see what we can mak' o' him."

" Good evening ! " cried the dealer, striding in and nodding contemptuously to Peterkin. " Now I'm in a hurry. I've wasted too much time already over this trifling business."

" But ye're just on a holiday, ye ken," said Peterkin simply.

The other snorted in annoyance.

" Ah—er—never mind. Well, shall we say five pounds for the two vases ? "

" No, sir," replied Peterkin with great emphasis. " We'll say five hunder pound for the twa vases, if you please."

Had the roof suddenly fallen upon him, or had the grey cat sleeping by the fire uttered the words, Anderson could not have been more astounded. He gave a start and turned purple. Recovering himself

with an effort, he began to cough and splutter and to utter exclamations it is as well neither Peterkin nor Elspeth understood.

"My goodness!" he cried. "Are you mad? You —you ignorant clodhopper!"

Peterkin carefully put the vases back in the press and locked the door. Then he turned to the dealer.

"Genuine auld cheeny like that is worth mair nor its wecht in gold nooadays—as you very well ken. Mrs Maclauchlan's grand-auntie got them frae the family she was servin' in Chelsea mair nor a hunder year ago."

"Well, then," interrupted the dealer, "I'll go the length of fifty pounds for the vases."

"Ye're no' getting them at no price. They're goin' up to London to be selt by honest folk that'll see Elspeth gets a fair thing for them."

The man blustered and stormed, using many ugly words, for he well knew the great value of such priceless bits of Chelsea pottery, and what a rare chance he was losing. But the Pickletillie champion remained as unmoved as the Cathlaw hill that towered above Elspeth's cottage.

Seeing that it was useless to argue any longer, the antique man said sullenly—

"Very well, if you're asses enough not to accept a reasonable price for the china, I'll take my chair."

"Oh, ay," said Peterkin with a twinkle in his eye, the meaning of which the other little understood, "here's yer receipt for the siller. Where's the chair?"

"Why, there," exclaimed the dealer, pointing to it.

"Excuse me," said Peterkin. "Would ye let me

see that receipt again? Ay, it says 'Scotch-made armchair.' But it's the first time I've heard that Thomas Chippendale was a Scot, though maybe he deserved to be."

The outwitted dealer glared at him in speechless wrath.

"Who—who are you?" he spluttered, thinking this must be some expert in antiques disguised as a simple village grocer.

"I'm an honest man, I hope," said Peterkin modestly. "Maybe ye haena seen mony o' them in the course o' yer life, Maister Moses Aaronson—Oh, I beg your pardon—what am I sayin'? Anyway, ye're no' to get a Chippendale chair worth fifty pound for thirty shillin's. There's yer money back."

"Is—is there no justice—no law in this infernal, savage country?" gasped the dealer.

"Oh, ay, there's plenty o' law, an' a very smert polis force, I can tell ye. Why, just the ither day they nabbit a German Jew that was gaun aboot under a false name cheatin' folk, an' he's noo enjoyin' the bracin' breezes o' the North Sea up at Peterhead. Wad ye like to gang there?"

The last words were addressed to the back of the departing Mr "Anderson," who slammed the cottage door very hard behind him.

"It's the smertest thing ye ever did, Matthew," said the admiring Posty to his friend a week or two later. "Six hunder pound for the cheeny an' sixty pound for the chair! Elspeth'll be comfortable for the rest o' her life. Hoo quick ye saw through yon rascal!"

Peterkin smiled modestly.

" Eh, I see ye've got a new caird up announcin' yer new season's rooburb," Posty grinned wickedly. " I'll tak' a pound or twa jist to encourage yer enterprise, like."

## XV

## THE LADIES' TAILOR

THOMAS INGRAM
LADIES' AND GENT.'S TAILOR
(*From London and Paris*)

Such was the brand-new sign in gilt letters which flashed forth like the rising sun one morning on the front of a long-empty shop in the main street of Pickletillie.

For many a year Robbie Thoms had clothed the male population of the parish, much to their contentment, for Robbie made all garments of a generous size, and therefore comfortable; and was careful to consult individual tastes, and to remember each one's preferences. Robbie would never forget that Matthew Peterkin liked plain pepper-and-salt trousers; that John Cunningham, the joiner, would have nothing but a certain shade of grey tweed, summer and winter; that Laighriggs, the farmer, adhered to a peculiar hue of mustard-yellow that never faded—and the garments Robbie made lasted long. David Ramsay, the precentor, thirty years ago had got Robbie to make for him a frockcoat of such excellent wearing quality that it had appeared in the box every Sunday all that time, and still looked quite good.

But Robbie had now threaded his last needle and heated his last goose; and on Sundays his regretful

customers visited his last resting-place in a corner of the kirkyard, while waiting for the service to begin. And so there was an opening for a tailor in Pickletillie.

"Hae ye seen the latest?" asked John Malcolm, the postman, as he handed in half a dozen letters and circulars at Mr Peterkin's shop that morning. "I assure ye we'll be even wi' St Mertouns itsel' noo, if not superior."

"To what are ye alludin', John?" asked the grocer, as, having cleared a space on the counter by pushing aside a box of Loch Fyne kippers and a keg of salt butter, with knitted brow he ran over the morning's post. "Maistly circulars this mornin', John. Here's a kind man, by name Peter Norman, offers to len' me ony sum frae five pounds to five thoosand withoot security an' withoot publicity by return o' post. You push the button, and he does the rest—includin' you, I've little doobt. Unfortunately, accordin' to Act o' Parliament, he's got to put his real name and nationality on his letter, and he's Peter Norman Skin-affenheim, frae Frankfort-on-the-Main. Hooever, his circular'll dae to row up an unce o' tobaccy. An' here's a company bein' got up to mak' paper ooten cabbage stocks—capital, a hunder thoosand, in one pound shares—just that nae! An' here's subscriptions wanted for a testimonial to the County Road Surveyor, wha's retirin' efter fifty years' valuable service!—fifty years o' daein' naething, so far as this pairish is concerned, the lazy body that he is. It's guid news that he's giein' up. But I believe if the deil himsel' was retirin' frae business, John, somebody wad get up a presentation to him."

John Malcolm always liked a crack with Peterkin,

but he was on his morning round, and his red bicycle, that would bear him to Mill of Divot, Westercraigs, and the utmost confines of the parish, waited at the door, letting everybody know that the postman tarried within. Still, though it meant delaying His Majesty's mails, the matter of the new tailor, of whose advent apparently Peterkin had not heard, must be discussed.

" Hae ye no' heard aboot the new tailor, Matthew ? " the postman asked, now that there was a chance. " His shop's open the day."

" So that's what ye was referrin' to, John. I heard something aboot a tailor comin' to the shop where Macgregor, the pigman, was for a while. Weel, we need a tailor in the parish noo that puir Rabbie Thoms is awa. Born naked, we maun be covered, John ; frae the cradle to the grave we need claes, and it'll be lang or the tailor's unemployed."

"But this is an extra grand kind o' tailor, Matthew ; he's a ladies' tailor frae London an' Pairris. I'm thinkin' yer dressmakin' department will soon feel the competition."

" Oh," said the good man, who had not thought of anything of the kind, and was a little taken aback. " I've heard o' ladies' tailors afore, and tailor-made costumes, goons, and jackets ; and, as ye hint, John, folk's aye ready to try something new. Ah, well, we'll see—six times hae I been threatened wi' serious opposition, and here I am still daein' fine and gettin' on weel, payin' twenty shillin's in the pound, and lookin' the haill world in the face."

" I'm thinkin' the folk'll aye support ye, Matthew," said the postman, mounting his official bicycle ; but wherever he went that day he told how Pickletillie

had got a lift up by the coming of the Ladies' and Gents.' Tailor from London and Paris.

That afternoon Miss MacFadyen, Rowan Cottage, had a tea party, to which the more genteel ladies of the village were invited. Those who had the good fortune to be asked, wearing their Sunday costumes and smartest bonnets, arrived betimes, and were admitted by a little maid, in black dress and starched apron, who solemnly ushered them into the spare bedroom to take off their things. Well they knew, that though there was not a soul to be seen, their progress down the street had been watched from behind blinds and curtains by the envious eyes of the not-sufficiently genteel who had not been invited. Nor was the occasion an ordinary one, for a great sensation was provided by the appearance of Mrs Cunningham, the joiner's wife, in a new fur coat of a style and expensiveness that took everybody's breath away.

"Am I seein' richt?" asked Mrs Thomson, the blacksmith's wife, from behind the parlour curtains of Mrs Ramsay, the shoemaker's wife—neither lady meeting the social requirements of Miss MacFadyen's tea parties. "Is that Phemie Cunningham, or is it some duchess just steppit oot o' her motor car?"

"Ay—it's Phemie Cunningham," said the shoemaker's wife bitterly.

"It's no' possible; wi' fifty pounds worth o' sealskin on her back."

"Ye see, John Cunningham made so much money buyin' an' sellin' wood lately that he gied her the fur coat on the thirtieth anniversary o' their weddin'. Fifty pound, did ye say, Marget Tamson? Fifty

pound never put that coat there—unless it's no' real seal, but just dyed rabbit fur."

The blacksmith's wife shook her head decidedly.

"It's quite real," she said; "onybody can see that."

And so indeed it was, as everybody soon knew, for at that moment it was being examined and praised and admired by the ladies at the tea party, and even the price—eighty guineas—was mentioned. The gratified Miss MacFadyen felt that never had any of her tea parties been so highly graced and honoured.

" But you know, Mrs Cunningham," she said, with a beaming smile, " the worst—or perhaps I should say the best—about a fur coat is that one must live up to it—must be dressed accordingly—in a toot angsongble, so to speak. You must have such smart hats and costumes ! "

" Tailor-made, an' that minds me o' the new establishment begood in the village the day," remarked Mrs Nicholson, whose husband was the beadle of the kirk and minister's man, and who had been invited, not because she was really " genteel," but for the reason that, because of her husband's ecclesiastical position, she knew all the gossip of the parish, and was only too willing to impart it.

" Does anybody know anything about this Mr Ingram ? " asked the hostess, busy filling up the second cup. " Was yer tea quite sweet enough, may I ask ? "

" Jist beautiful ! " answered everybody.

" I saw him the day," said the beadle's wife, referring to the new tailor, " such a handsome young man—so smart and well dressed. He belongs St Mertouns way, I'm tellt."

" With experience in London and Paris," remarked Mrs Cunningham, who was evidently hankering after a tailor-made costume. " He should be a very good ladies' tailor."

" I wonder if Mrs Gillies "—Mrs Gillies was the wife of the parish minister—" will employ him," remarked Miss Johnston, the doctor's housekeeper. " She's always well dressed."

" She gets all her things from a man in Edinburgh," said the beadle's wife.

" A man ? " echoed Miss M'Tavish.

" A-weel, it's a man's name onywey, for John has often seen the cardboard boxes lyin' aboot the manse. It's a grand shop in George Street patronised by a' the nobility an' gentry—so it says on the boxes."

" A bonny penny that will cost," said Mrs Cunningham, " but, of coorse, the minister's steepen' is more than doubled the now, and they'll just be rollin' in wealth."

" That's quite a mistake, John tells me," remarked the beadle's wife. " Ye see, the steepen' was what they ca' ' communicated,' or something like that, hunders o' years ago, and it doesna rise and fa', so the minister is nane the better o' the increased price o' grain. There's the minister of Balconquhar noo, gettin' twel' hunder a year."

" Fair scandalous ! " cried Miss M'Tavish. " That'll be aboot twenty-five pound for every sermon he preaches, and they would be dear at a penny the piece."

" Dae ye ken," began the beadle's wife, and at the words spoken in a hushed tone every ear was strained, " oor minister's in debt ? "

" No ! " cried the assembled company in shocked tones.

" A-weel, John has seen lawyers' letters—at least, he's seen ongvelopes wi' an Edinburgh lawyer's name on them—lyin' in the manse midden—I mean the ashpit," she added hurriedly as a shudder went around the company, " an' what does the minister get lawyers' letters aboot if it's no' debt, or trouble o' some kind ? "

" Just that—it'll be his wife's extravagance," pronounced the doctor's housekeeper, and from the day of Miss M'Tavish's tea party the story went round that dire trouble brooded like a threatening cloud over the manse, the expensive tastes of Mrs Gillies being the cause.

Also, it was unanimously resolved by the ladies present that Mrs Cunningham must have a tailor-made costume to match her fur coat. So next day she betook herself to the establishment of the ladies' tailor from London and Paris.

" A costume, madam ? " said the young man briskly, casting his eye over her stout figure, " Certainly, madame. I know the very style that will suit you, and my experience, gained in the two leading capitals of Europe, is entirely at your service."

" Ye see, I've gotten a new fur coat—— "

" And you do not wish to disgrace it, madame, by wearing one of the local monstrosities—I understand. Oh, I assure you, madame, I can't go through this place without shuddering. Both men and women look as though they had got their clothes made by carpenters or plumbers."

The remark soon reached Mr Peterkin, whose wife and daughter and assistants had done most of the dressmaking in the place for years.

"The impident young whupper-snapper!" exclaimed the worthy man, who was, nevertheless, somewhat troubled, for soon half a dozen of his customers had ordered dresses from the London and Paris tailor, and his dressmaking department naturally grew slack. Much worse than that, however, a new and more frivolous and worldly tone began to pervade the place. Dress was talked about as it had never been before, and all the ladies of the parish were persuaded that only tailor-made gowns were worth putting on.

A fortnight later Mrs Cunningham got her costume, and very nice it was. But next day she got the account, which was not nearly so nice. The total made her gasp, nor was she revived by the intimation at the foot—"Terms cash. Immediate payment is respectfully requested."

John Cunningham said something rather strong, and so did the other husbands, when confronted with similar documents closely following the delivery of the goods. Trouble arose all round and the sky darkened over many hitherto happy homes.

As usual it was Mr Peterkin who proved the good genius, driving the danger away from that sober, well-doing community.

One day a young man strolled into the shop and shook Peterkin warmly by the hand.

"You don't know me, sir," he said as the grocer, though he had returned the hand-clasp, looked puzzled.

"I canna just place ye a' at ainee," replied he, "but ye're Pickletillie-born; I could swear to that. I wad ken a Pickletillie man though I met him naked

at the Equator, or covered wi' furs on the top o' the North Pole."

"Yes—I'm Willie Ferguson, that used to be apprentice with Robbie Thoms, the tailor."

"Oh"—a gleam came into the grocer's eye—"shake hands again, Wullie. I mind ye fine now. Dod, ye made the very pair o' breeks I'm wearin'."

"I did that," said Willie after Peterkin had lifted his apron to let him get a glimpse of them, "and grand value, I'm sure, you'll find them."

"The very best—like a' Robbie's—and your—productions. An' what are ye daein' noo, Wullie?"

"Been getting experience here and there, and I'm thinking now of settling down."

Peterkin nearly jumped. Here was the way out Providentially provided.

"Then why no' settle doon here among yer ain folk? Can ye mak' leddies' dresses?"

"Certainly. I'm a dab at that."

"Hurray! The very thing! Set up shop here as sune as ye like. Pickletillie'll rally roond ye to a man—and a woman."

Willie thought for a moment.

"You see," he said doubtfully, "there's some things to buy—sewing machines, and cloth, and——"

Peterkin leaned over the counter.

"Of course—I ken. Say nae mair. I've a hunder pound lyin' the noo no' daein' muckle, and it micht as weel be drivin' a shewin' machine, so to speak—and there wad be nae interest."

"You are very kind, Mr Peterkin. Well, I accept your offer, and I'll settle down here among the people that I know."

And that soon cooked the goose of the London and Paris tailor. After a month or two he disappeared, and it was reported that the landlord never got his rent. Willie Ferguson caught on from the beginning, and by and by he made success certain by marrying Cunningham's youngest girl. The craze for tailor-mades, however, has largely died down among the Pickletillie ladies, much to the satisfaction of Mr Peterkin and the relief of not a few anxious husbands.

Peterkin said the last word on the subject, pronouncing the epitaph of the absconded tailor.

"It was dress that became the subject o' attention in the Garden o' Eden as soon as the warld's first trouble began," he remarked to Malcolm, the postman, "an' clothes has been responsible for much dispeace in the warld ever since. Folk should be comfortable and respectable in their dress, and as smart as they can, especially the young. The material should be the best ye can afford——"

"Exactly," broke in the postman, lighting his pipe. "Shakespeare agrees wi' ye, Matthew—

> "Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
> But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy,
> For the apparel oft proclaims the man."

## XVI

## THE PICKLETILLIE SPORTS

'THIS day's date," observed Posty, looking at Peterkin's calendar, which hung above the row of tea canisters, and bore the well-known name of Matthew Peterkin, Grocer, Draper, and General Merchant, as well as a view of the village and information about the postal rates, " this date is the eighteenth o' July."

" Quite richt," said Peterkin, flicking a fly off the salt butter, and replacing a half-cut ham on the shelf, " also it's a Friday, but what aboot that ? Onything o' great moment happened this day ? "

" I wasna thinkin' o' the past, but o' the future," replied Posty.

" Imphm—confound thae flees. I'm like Pharaoh, oppressed wi' a plague o' them. Dod, efter the flees, I dinna wonder he wasna frichtit wi' the cattle disease, the boils, the hail, an' the locusts."

" It's a great year for flees," agreed Posty, " an' next it'll be wasps."

" But what's this ye're looking forrit to, John ? " asked Peterkin, after he had arranged a nice sticky fly-paper just where the enemy was most likely to see it. " Another rise in yer salary or a fall in the postage rates ? "

" Na—dae ye realise that it's only six weeks till the last Friday of August ? "

"No," said Peterkin. "Nor dae I consider that it's seven weeks till the first Friday o' September, an' echt weeks till the second Friday o' the same."

"Hoots, man. If we're to have a sports day this year it'll hae to be in the end o' next month."

"Noo ye're talking plain sense, John, and I'm obliged to ye for remindin' me o' the games. Dod, ye're richt. It's time we started to the arrangements."

"Ay," said Posty. "Dae ye ken there's bills oot in Craigport the day announcin' their sports for the fifteenth of August."

"Dae ye say so? Set them up! They're aye ettlin' to be upsides wi' us. But we'll haud oor ain, John. We'll be to the front as usual."

He spoke energetically and hopefully, but inwardly told himself that six weeks was none too long a time to communicate with competitors, arrange a prize list, engage judges, hire a band, see to the catering, and make all the hundred and one arrangements necessary if the thing was to be done successfully.

"We maun make oorsels into a commytee of two, John," said Peterkin, "which is the second best kind —the best being composed of one only—an' set the ball rollin'. After last year's success it'll be easy. We ken the ropes noo, so to speak. We're no greenhorns or pioneers on a trackless plain. I hae a' last year's papers an' accounts to guide us."

"What aboot a pulpit intimation for the first off-go," remarked Posty. "Think ye he'll dae it this time?"

"He," thus referred to, was the Rev. Dr Gillies, the respected parish minister.

"He wadna last year," responded Peterkin. "He said he was apprehensive it wad conduce to a satur-

nalia o' back-something orgies. But when he saw it was such a success, an' nae disorderliness, he changed his mind and said it would tend to amity an' fraterisation an' to the men's sanny in something or other. So we'll try him."

"It wad be a guid beginnin'," said Posty.

"We'll gang an' see him the noo," cried the energetic Peterkin, beginning to take off his apron. "Nae time like the present. Come along, John."

"Jist gang yersel', Matthew," Posty hung back. "Ye ken hoo to put it owre him. If I was there I'd be sayin' something oot o' place."

"Weel," agreed Peterkin complacently, "I'll no' say that I didna understand hoo to tak' him. I'll be back in half an 'oor an' let ye ken."

Peterkin's diplomacy was so successful that on Sunday forenoon the congregation was informed that the Annual Games and Sports would be held on Friday, 29th August. "Full particulars may be obtained from Mr Peterkin or Mr John Malcolm, Post Office. I hope," added the reverend doctor, "that many of the youths of the parish will enter our local Marathon with the enthusiasm of the ancient Greeks, who spared no pains to win a fading garland of wild olive, and so improve their physical stamina, and concurrently confer much enjoyment on the spectators by their feats of strength and skill."

At the "skailin'," Peterkin approached his fellow elder, Reid of Hillend.

"Gin this wasna the Sabbath, Hillie," he remarked, "I wad be askin' for the len o' yer laigh field to haud the games in again this year."

"Weel, Matthew," responded Hillie, "gin this

wasna the Sabbath I wad be sayin' that ye're quite welcome."

"An'—maybe a pound or twa for the prizes?" added the intrepid asker.

"Gin this wasna the Sabbath, I wad be sayin' five pound," responded Hillie, who was known for his open-handed generosity.

"That'll dae fine," said Peterkin. "Sabbath or no' Sabbath."

Early in the week he went round the other farmers—approaching even the notoriously close-fisted Muckersie of Laighriggs, who utterly refused to contribute a penny for ony sic nonsense—and soon collected enough to furnish a handsome prize list. Then suitable advertisements were inserted in the newspapers, and immediately pipers, dancers, and athletes from all over Scotland began to send in their names as entrants for the various events.

That remarkable "committee," Peterkin and Posty, met again on a Friday evening to consider the position of affairs.

"We've got on grand, John," was the "convener's" report. "They're coming frae north, south, east, an' west, like the Hielanders to Prince Charlie's standard. The entries for the dancin' is double last year's an' for the ither events very near double. A' the Samsons and Goliaths in Scotland are girdin' up their loins to astonish us by their jumpin' an' hammer-throwin'; there's even two champion wrestlers comin' frae Cumberland to show us hoo they can lay each other low in the dust. Craigport! Dinna mention Craigport to me! They'll no' hae the eleet o' the athletic world like us."

"Oor prospects are as rosy as the dawn," remarked Posty, filling his pipe. "It's a' arranged as neat as ninepence," and he began to smile pleasantly, evidently under the impression that there was nothing more to be done, but, as to that, Peterkin speedily disillusioned him.

"See here," said the energetic "convener," producing a sheaf of ruled paper, a pen, and a big ink bottle. "We'll just draw out a complete list o' the competitors under the heads o' the different events, so as the judges'll ken what they're daein'. I'll call off the names, an' you'll write them doon. Are ye ready?"

So Posty realised that, if success had been assured, there was still a good deal of hard spadework to be done; and for a couple of hours the two toiled at their task.

"We're to hae a great whiff o' the peat-reek, appearinly," observed Malcolm. "Wha's this H. Macpherson frae Kilmarannachie that's goin' to dance the Hielant fling?"

"Oh, he'll be some big hefty Hielander frae the wilds o' Badenoch," said Peterkin. "He'll hae red whiskers an' broad shoothers, but he'll be a rale smert dancer. Is he in for the hammer-throwin' or the caber-tossin' as weel?"

He was not, apparently, but he meant to try the sailor's hornpipe and the Irish jig, as likewise did D. Macintosh from the same place.

"Twa fine stoot lads frae Badenoch," remarked Peterkin, "drawn here by the fame o' the Pickletillie games. "'H' 'll stand for Hamish, an' 'D' for Donald, an' Hamish Macpherson an' Donald Macintosh'll lift the prizes, ye'll see."

And so they did, as it turned out, and, at the same time, contributed to the interest of the proceedings in a way little dreamt of by Peterkin and his friend.

In due time Peterkin approached Messrs Peter Tosh & Son, the Pickletillie bakers, whose part it was to supply food to the holiday crowd drawn together by the games. Peter Tosh, as has been before remarked, was perhaps the most irritable, cantankerous man in the parish, but Peterkin knew him well, and approached with a genial smile intended to soften the atmosphere.

Peter was found in his bakehouse below the shop, where the temperature was high, and everything shrouded with flour.

"Well, Peter," the tactful one observed, "here's the travellin' gold mine comin' roond again for ye to put yer hand in an' tak' oot a nievefu'."

Peter Tosh, a very small, broad man, looked up from his baking with a red, lowering face.

"To what are ye referrin', Matthew, may I ask?" he enquired heavily. "If you ken ony way o' makin' money, easy or no' easy, it's mair nor I do."

"Hoots, ye're daein' rale weel in this grand establishment o' yours, Peter. What I'm speaking aboot is the games on the last Friday of August. Ye'll hae a tent as before, I suppose, an' supply the public wi' yer tasty pies, terts, scones, cookies, tea, et settry?"

"Huh! Precious little profit in that, if that's what ye're pleased to refer to as a gold mine. It's slavery for days, an' hard labour frae mornin' till nicht on the grand holiday itsel'. I'm sure ye micht get some other body to tak' on the trauchle."

This he said, feeling certain there was no other

possible caterer, and therefore he was not a little taken aback when Peterkin returned :

" We like to encourage local industry. Still, we could get Bridie of St Mertouns to take it on——"

Peter Tosh's red face grew redder, and he shot an angry glance at the wily one.

" Oh, we'll manage," he said. " But dinna you an' Posty an' the rest o' ye run away wi' the redeeclous notion that we'll be millyunaires ower the heid o't."

Brightly dawned the famous day, and bright as the morning was Peterkin arrayed in his Highland garb of Macbean tartan, which he had got for the occasion last year. At an early hour competitors and spectators began to arrive. The school was the meeting-place, and from there a gallant procession set out, Peterkin leading, twelve famous pipers playing, and dancers in every shade of tartan walking behind.

To Peterkin's gratification and delight, the Rev. Dr Gillies appeared early on the ground. It was a great thing to have the parish minister's approval and patronage of the sports.

" I have just looked in for a very few minutes, to show my approval of the proceedings, and to encourage such a worthy enterprise, my dear Mr Peterkin," he announced in his most benignant tones. " I have been told that everything is conducted in the most decorous fashion, and I can well believe it when you are at the head of affairs, my dear sir. Your name and reputation are a guarantee for the strictest propriety."

Peterkin beamed.

" I'm sure we'll earn your approval, sir," he returned. " Our motto is the apostle's : ' Let all things be done decently and in order.' "

" Unfortunately," went on the reverend gentleman searching his pockets from his waistcoat to the tails of his coat, " I have come away without my glasses. Time, my dear Peterkin, blurs our vision, and—er——"

" I'll get a nice place for ye, sir, near the dancin' platform, so ye'll get a nearhand view," and he placed a chair for the minister on the opposite side from that occupied by the judges.

" Most comfortable and convenient. Thank you, my dear sir. Now the pipers strike up a lively air. How inspiriting! No wonder our Highland soldiers have proved invincible on every battlefield in the world, when inspired by such strains. Now the dancing begins. The Highland fling is announced. What is the name of this competitor ? "

Peterkin consulted his list.

" No. 1—H. Macpherson, Kilmarannachie," he announced.

" Just so. A Macpherson, member of a famous clan ; a well-favoured youth, but somewhat slight and small of stature for a young Highlander. Don't you think so, Mr Peterkin ? "

That gentleman looked at the dancer now beginning the opening steps, and after one glance, wheeled round hurriedly.

" See, sir," he cried, " they're beginnin' the caber tossin' at the other side o' the field. That'll be far mair interestin' than the dancin'."

" Not a bit, my good sir," said the reverend gentleman firmly. He was not going to be dictated to by a mere elder. " I specially desire to see the dancing. All nations, from the Greeks and Romans downwards, have had their national dances, and the Scots are by

no means the least in this field. We ought to foster and encourage an art which is so expressive of the national characteristics, and so racy of the soil. Ah! they are cheering this young man! Good!" and the minister vigorously clapped his hands. "They are afraid he may be timid and backward, and they wish to give him courage. A very proper spirit to show. What a well-favoured youth he is—and look at his graceful limbs, Mr Peterkin."

"I—I see them," said Peterkin desperately.

"His kilt is just a trifle brief, don't you think?"

"Far owre short, sir—fair scandalous!"

"Oh—I don't know. A young man with limbs so shapely, looking as if they had been carved out of white Carrara marble, will naturally desire to exhibit them. You must not be too censorious, my dear sir, even if you are my leading elder. How gracefully the young man dances! How his yellow locks float in the breeze! Well done, sir," he cried, as the dancer finished and retired amid loud applause.

"Very good, indeed, so pretty and graceful. Don't you think so?"

"Oh! splendid, sir," said the elder, wiping his forehead.

The next competitor turned out to be "D. Macintosh" from the same place, and when D. Macintosh appeared, Peterkin's worst fears were confirmed.

"Ah! another Highland young man. Also slender and graceful, but dark-haired this time. Again the shapely limbs, Mr Peterkin. Why! a sculptor would be in raptures over them. I had no idea the rising race of young men in the Highlands was so well-favoured. I must call the attention of my friend,

Professor MacRitchie, the ethnologist, to the fact. Ah, he also acquits himself well, and earns his meed of applause. It is most interesting, but now, my good Peterkin, I fear I must go."

" Thank guid—eh—that's a peety, sir."

" Pressing duties call me——"

Peterkin, interrupting his apologies, got him off the field as quickly as possible, keeping well away from where the competitors were standing, and then sought Malcolm, who had got a holiday, and was assisting the judges.

A series of muffled roars, like the rumblings of distant thunder, coming from behind Peter Tosh's refreshment tent, reached his ears. He went round to see what was the matter.

A motor lorry from Craigport, loaded with fragrant meat pies, rhubarb and apple tarts, cookies, scones, biscuits and lemonade, had drawn up on the road, and a man and a girl in charge were selling these dainties briskly over the hedge to those inside the sports ground.

On the other side of the hedge stood Peter Tosh, his coat and vest off, his shirt sleeves rolled up to his shoulders, his face at its reddest with rage, telling the Craigport man what he thought of him.

The supplying of refreshments was Peter's monopoly. What right had he, an outsider and an alien, to invade the parish and destroy the inhabitants thereof with his pestilent and indigestible rubbish! Or words to that effect. But the Craigport man merely smiled and went on selling pies, and, as they were a penny cheaper than Peter's (though maybe not so good), they met with a ready sale.

Peterkin, whose prudent motto was " Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you," silently disappeared and found Posty.

" I say, John," he whispered hoarsely, " is there ony mair lassies to dance ? "

" No," replied Posty regretfully. " Wasn't it rale bonnie ? "

" Bonnie ! I wish ye had been me this last half 'oor ! "

## XVII

## LOST, A GOLD BANGLE

One fine autumn evening Mr Peterkin surveyed with much satisfaction his first consignments of new season's goods. In addition to the ordinary things —tea, sugar, butter, cheese—there were damsons and greengages, and freshly-made preserves, and all of excellent quality and at moderate prices, which would enable him to give bargains to the good folks of Pickletillie, and that was what he enjoyed. In these grain and potato harvest times the parish was well-to-do. Everybody, down to the children who worked in the harvest fields, had money to spend. So the excellent man looked forward to a prosperous season.

With invoices and accounts spread out, he checked the items, pausing and looking up when a bicycle stopped at the door, and the rider, a tall girl in a pink-striped costume, stepped lightly into the shop.

"Good evening, Miss Maggie," he greeted her with a pleased smile, for she was a favourite of his, and her father, William Ainslie, farmer of Mains of Cathlaw, was a good customer. "An' hoo are ye a' up at the Mains? Nae need to ask hoo you are. Health and happiness are written on your face."

Maggie Ainslie laughed. She was one of the belles

of a parish not altogether undistinguished for the good looks of its daughters. Her pretty yellowish hair was, of course, bobbed and shingled in the approved fashion. Her eyes were deep blue like the sky, her cheeks tinted like the wild rose, and when she smiled there were few male hearts under a certain age which did not beat a little faster.

" And what can I do for you the nicht, Miss Maggie ? " asked Peterkin, his gaze wandering hopefully to the drapery counter, where new autumn blouses, jumpers, and hats were displayed in brown, yellow, orange, and grey. Maggie had got her pink cycling dress from him. Perchance some of the autumn styles would tempt her.

" I've lost my gold bangle, Mr Peterkin," said she, " and I wonder if you would help me to find it."

" Oh, Miss Maggie, I'm sorry to hear that," said Peterkin with ready sympathy. " We nane o' us like to lose onything we're taen up wi', especially a valuable thing like that. When had ye it on last ? "

" At church yesterday, and I never missed it till I got home."

" Could it hae slipped off yer arm ? "

" It must. You see, I had on a short-sleeved dress, and I wore the bangle away up here," and she indicated the place on a nicely-shaped arm, " and it must have fallen over my elbow and right off."

" I see. It's maist unfortunate. Can ye describe the bracelet ? "

" It was just a plain gold ring, rather heavy and massive, and it had no marks on it except the hall-mark, eighteen carat, and some—some initials—the initials of two people—on the inside edge."

"Imphm!" said Peterkin without the ghost of a smile. "Ineeshals on the inside o' the ring. That should identify it. Well, I'll put a notice in my window, and if it's been found by any honest person ye should have it back very soon."

"Thank you so much, Mr Peterkin," said Maggie. "I'll give a reward of a pound for the return of the bangle. You see, it's rather valuable, and I got it from a—a friend—and I'm very sorry about losing it."

"Certainly—of course you are, Miss Maggie," said Peterkin tactfully.

"They say it means bad luck to lose a ring of any sort."

"Sic nonsense! Don't you believe that, Miss Maggie, even though it had been an engagement ring ye had lost. Weel, I'll put up the bill, and I'll let ye ken the moment there's ony word o' the bangle."

"Thank you again; you're always so kind," and with a smile some young men of the parish would have given much to earn she mounted her bicycle and rode away.

Peterkin was busy with a big sheet of paper writing out the intimation, when Posty came in.

"Ye haena found a heavy eighteen-carat gold bangle in the course o' yer peregrinations o' the parish the day, John?" he asked.

"Eh? Me? No. Noo that sovereigns is oot o' use an' watch-chains oot o' fashion, I never see gold in ony shape or form, Matthew. Wha's lost the bangle?"

"Miss Ainslie o' the Mains. She was here the noo askin' me to put up a bill aboot it."

"The unfailin' resource. I'm sure there's never a week o' the year when there's no' a bill in yer window aboot something bein' lost or missin', an' if it's no' that it's a concert or a sale."

"A'body looks in my window some time, ye see. It's a grand advertisin' medium. Maggie lost the bangle comin' frae the kirk yesterday."

"I'm no' surprised. Wi' the short sleeves—sometimes nane at a'—they're wearin' at the kirk noo, an' the rings slidin' up an' doon, it's nae wonder they fa' off."

"Imphm! There's the ineeshals o' two folk—hers an' another's—on the bangle. Heard ye ever o' the lassie haein' a sweetheart, John?"

"Oh, ay," replied Malcolm. There were few things concerning the people of the parish, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, that Posty did not know. "His name's Anderson—Frank Anderson. He's a lawyer ower in St Mertouns. I often see him motoring up to the Mains."

"Jist that noo. Alloo you for kennin' a'thing aboot a'body, John."

"Ye're no' that far ahint yersel' when it comes to the news of the parish, Matthew. Forby, a'body soon kens aboot a love affair."

"Ay, as Robbie says—

> "A youthful, loving, modest pair
> In other's arms breathe out the tender tale
> Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the evening gale.

An' though they're sure there's no' a soul within miles, somebody's sure to hae seen them, and next

day it's a' ower the place that they're engaged. But aboot the bill. Hoo will this dae ?

£1 REWARD.

Lost, between Pickletillie Church and Mains of Cathlaw, a massive gold bangle. Finder will receive above reward on returning same to this shop, or to Mr Ainslie, Mains of Cathlaw."

" Grand ! " said Posty. " That'll dae the trick, especially the ' £1 reward.' "

Everybody passing or visiting the shop saw the notice, and soon not a few were searching the roads along which the bangle might have been lost. Here a difficulty arose, for there were two possible roads and also a footpath. So some of the more eager went up to the Mains to ask Miss Ainslie which she had taken on the way home.

A week or two passed, and there was no word of the bangle. Either it had fallen into some place where it could not be seen, or it had been found by some tramp or tinker or other person not likely to return it, even for the reward offered.

On Saturday afternoon the search was taken up by three clever and careful investigators. Johnnie Peterkin and his two boy chums, Willie Cunningham and Alick Thomson, set out on the trail as treasure-seekers, resolved to find the bangle and share the reward.

Better than most of the searchers, they knew where to look, and with great perseverance they poked among long grasses and ferns and brambles, and examined ditches and peered into hedge roots, always with the gleaming gold circle in their minds' eyes.

While they were half-buried in a very muddy ditch a young man strolled along and hailed them.

"Well, boys," he called out, "is it tadpoles or hazel nuts or brambles you're after?"

They gave him a look of scorn—his ignorance was so great.

"No," said Johnnie. "It's too late for tadpoles; they're all grown into frogs now, and hazels don't grow in ditches, and the brambles aren't ripe yet. It's lost treasure we're hunting for."

"Oh! Gold-seekers, eh?"

"Yes. A lady's gold bangle's lost, and we're trying to find it."

"And what will you do with it if you find it?"

"Take it to my father, of course. He's offering a reward for it."

"Just so. Well, have you looked under yon wild rose bush? That's a very likely place for a thing of the kind to be hidden. I'd certainly look there if I were you."

He passed on. Johnnie and his two fellow-treasure-hunters, after some further useless searching of the ditch, looked under the rose bush as advised, and, sure enough, there lay the bracelet!

With wild whoops of delight they swooped upon it, and their cries reached the young man, who came hurriedly back.

"What? You've actually found it! Splendid! Now take it to Mr Peterkin's as quickly as you can, so that the young lady may get it as soon as possible, She may wish to wear it at church to-morrow. See, here's a reward for you," and he gave each of them a shilling.

Ten minutes later, having covered a mile and a quarter in that time, Johnnie burst into the shop.

" We've found the bangle," he shrieked, regardless of who might be in. Fortunately it was only John Malcolm. " We've got it. Hooray ! "

" Johnnie," said his father severely, " hoo often am I to tell ye no' to be sae reckless and impatient. Sic ram-stam rushin' at things does nae guid. ' Festeeny lenty,' as yer schulemaister says, which means ' hasten slowly.' And so ye hae found the bracelet ? Whereabouts did ye lay saut on its tail, so to speak ? "

The two other boys now appeared, equally breathless, and Johnnie explained.

" We were all looking for it on the road that goes through the wood, where there's a ditch and ferns and brambles, and a young man came along and asked me what we were looking for."

" ' Tadpoles or hazel nuts,' he said," remarked Alick Thomson scornfully.

" Must have been off his nut," said Willie Cunningham.

" So I told him we were looking for a lost bracelet, and he said we should look under a rose bush over there, and we looked, and there was the bracelet lying."

Peterkin looked at Posty.

" What like was the young gentleman ? " asked Malcolm.

" Tall, fair hair, wee brown moustache—— "

" And plus fours—grey ? "

" Ay. I think he had been cyclin'."

" He had a motor standin' under a tree along the road," said Willie.

" I've seen him motoring often," added Alick.

" Just that," said Posty, who now knew well enough who the young gentleman was. With a nod and a drawing together of his brows he communicated the information to Peterkin.

" Eh—er—just so," said that gentleman. He took up the bangle which Johnnie had proudly extracted from his pocket. " It's the richt article sure enough," he announced. " I see the ineeshals on it—' M. A. and F. A.'—Maggie Ainslie and—Frank Anderson, did ye say, John ? "

Posty nodded—and winked.

" Aweel, Johnnie, ye'll get yer tea as quick as ye can. Syne ye'll tak' yer bicycle an' gang awa' up to Mains and tell Miss Ainslie her bangle's here."

" Ye'll no' need to bother," said Posty, " for here's Miss Ainslie hersel'."

" Good evening everybody," cried that young lady as, springing from her bicycle, she entered the shop. " Well, Mr Peterkin ? No news, I suppose ? "

" Yes, Miss Maggie, there's news—grand news—splendid news. Yer bangle's found."

" Never ! My word ! That's perfectly stunning ! Who found it, and where ? "

" Thae three laddies found it under a rose bush on the road that goes through the wood."

" Ah—yes—yes—I went home that way with some other girls when I lost it, but I don't understand how I could possibly have dropped it there."

" Imphm ! Still, ye maun, for there it was found. That's so, Johnnie ? "

" Yes, father," said the leader of the search party proudly.

" Sometimes the findin' of a thing is more mysterious

than the losin' of it," remarked Posty, as if to himself.

" Weel, here it's," said Peterkin, " no' a haet the waur. That's the grand thing aboot solid gold; it never rusts."

With a cry of delight Miss Maggie slipped the bangle on her arm, then took out her purse.

" Now about the reward," she said. " I suppose I'll have to split it in three, won't I? That'll be six and eightpence each—that right? Perhaps Mr Peterkin will give me change."

" The young gentleman gave us each a shilling already," said Johnnie honestly.

" What young gentleman? "

Peterkin and Posty grimaced to each other.

" The young gentleman that told us to look under the rose bush," said Johnnie. " I don't know who he was."

" Here he's," cried one of the boys, and just then Maggie's sweetheart, dismounting from a two-seater, joined them.

" I want some of your famous Pickletillie Mixture tobacco," he began in a loud voice, then stopped and looked round in rather a self-conscious way. " Oh—I—I didn't—— "

" How do, Frank? " cried Maggie. " I've got my bangle again at last, and I'm so delighted. Isn't it splendid? "

" Oh—er—indeed! I'm so glad."

" Fancy—those three boys found it."

" Under a rose bush up in the wood," said Peterkin drily.

" Oh—very clever of them."

"Yes, wasn't it? And the bangle's not a bit the worse."

"The fairies had watched ower it," suggested Peterkin with a twinkle. "They have a special likin' for love tokens."

At that moment another person strode in—no less a person than John Nicolson, kirk beadle and minister's man. All unconscious of the sensation he was about to make, he called out—

"Here ye are, Mr Peterkin, here's that gold bangle ye're advertisin' for. I was giein' the kirk its ainee-a-month clean up, an' I lifted the mattin' o' the passage to shake the stour ooten't, an' there was the bangle lyin' aneath as cosy as ye like. It maun hae faen an' rolled under the edge. Hulloa, what's wrang wi' ye a'?" and indeed they all seemed to be overtaken by surprise.

It was Mr Frank Anderson who recovered first.

"Oh, nothing—nothing is the matter. We're just a little bit surprised. Funny thing the bangle should turn up like that, you know. Many thanks for so kindly bringing it back. And—er—I believe there's a reward," and he thrust a Treasury note into the beadle's hand.

"Oh, I wasna wantin' naething. It's ower much. Weel, as you're so pressin'—thank ye very much."

He handed the bangle to Peterkin not a little puzzled by the demeanour of the party. Further to his surprise, the young man accompanied him to the door, talking about the weather, and stood there for some time discussing the state of the harvest. A very talkative young man, surely.

When Frank rejoined them he looked from Peterkin

to Maggie, from her to Posty, and from Posty to the three boys. A smile broke on his face, which gradually spread to the others, and in ten seconds all were laughing heartily, though perhaps the boys did not quite see the joke. When their mirth subsided it was Peterkin who, as usual, said the right thing.

"Aweel, Miss Maggie, the fairies hae been very guid to ye. Ye'll hae twa gold bangles noo, one for each arm. I hope we'll soon see a gold ring on your finger to match them."

"I'll see to that, sir," said Anderson. "Come, Maggie," and he handed her into the motor, and they drove off, forgetting all about her bicycle.

"Ah, love, love!" said Peterkin, taking possession of it and tearing up the bill in the window. "What daft-like things it mak's us dae, John!"

## XVIII

## A CENSUS CONTEST

It will be remembered by all very deeply interested readers that a feud existed between the neighbouring villages and parishes of Pickletillie and Balneuchar. The strife was founded on nothing better than rivalry —which should be accounted the greater; a controversy that always leads to envying and grieving at the good of our neighbour.

When Pickletillie produced a big potato Balneuchar retorted with a monster turnip. When the farmer of Laighriggs, in Pickletillie parish, got first prize for a black Angus calf, Mains of Balneuchar must reply with first for a Clydesdale mare and foal. When Pickletillie opened its water supply, Balneuchar must needs start a small gas work, which was still a thorn in the side of the other village, leading Mr Peterkin, the Pickletillie champion, to remark that gas was an extremely natural product of Balneuchar.

Now at the last census the figures for those two places had been—

| | |
|---|---|
| Pickletillie, . . . . | 391 |
| Balneuchar, . . . . | 389 |

and as the census drew near Balneuchar began to boast that Pickletillie would be nowhere this time. During the ten years two new houses had been built

in Balneuchar and none in Pickletillie, whose only fresh erection was a garage for Dr Auld and a hen-house for Cunningham, the joiner. Also, a new draper's shop had been opened in Balneuchar, employing a number of girls. Balneuchar had three times had twins, and though Pickletillie still boasted of Henry Halliday's triplets, that did not make up the leeway. And Balneuchar prided itself on being an extremely healthy place, with a large number of inhabitants over eighty and a very low death-rate—much less than that of Pickletillie. Oh yes, said Balneuchar triumphantly, Pickletillie will be far below us in the census this time!

John Malcolm, the Pickletillie postman, at Mill of Divot, on the outskirts of his beat, on an April morning encountered Sam Rodger, the Balneuchar letter-carrier, and after they had exchanged the time of day and discussed the latest eccentricity of the Postal Department, John said—

"I've been appointed census enumerator for our pairish, Sam."

"Have ye? Nae chance for me there. Oor schulemaister aye snaps up that job."

"Oor schulemaister is a scholar and a gentleman," replied John, subtly implying that the Balneuchar dominie was neither the one nor the other, but just a common person willing to do any trifling errand.

The Balneuchar official, ignoring the taunt, for he did feel a little sore at the dominie monopolising a job that might well have fallen to him, observed—

"Hech, it'll not be a very big undertakin' that, John. Ye'll sune coont a' the Pickletillie folk. If it was a go-ahead place like Balneuchar, nae! We're

gaun up by leaps and bounds, an' that ye'll see when the returns come oot."

"A-weel," retorted John, "that may be, but quantity's no a'thing; it's quality that coonts," and he hastily mounted his red bicycle and pedalled off, leaving the Balneuchar man to infer that Pickletillie's mental and moral quality was immensely above that of his own quite inferior parish.

John proceeded home somewhat thoughtfully nevertheless, and in the afternoon he went to see Mr Peterkin, and found that excellent grocer opening a small barrel of new potatoes.

"Look at them, John," he exclaimed, "a' the wey frae the Channel Islands, frae the sunny land o' France, wi' the sunshine on their bonnie skins. They're maybe no' very big, but, man, they're that sweet!"

"An' a sweet price, I daursay, Matthew," said the postman, taking one up and holding it gingerly between his finger and thumb, as if it were rare china or easily-tarnished silver.

"A marvel o' food distributin', John, a' the wey by sea an' land, through dizzens o' hands, frae Jersey to Pickletillie. It's a romance o' the grocery business."

"Nae doot, but I'm thinkin' I'll be daein' wi' my auld Arran Chiefs till I can howk my Duke o' Yorks, that'll no' cost me aboot tuppence apiece. But there's something far mair serious than that. The presteege o' Pickletillie is at stake."

He then told of his meeting with the Balneuchar postman, and of the boasting that was going on in the rival parish regarding the census results.

"An' sae they're crawin' croose, are they, the kittle, camsteary clamjamphrey!" exclaimed Peterkin, wax-

ing alliterative in his scorn. " A-weel, John, I'm feared they've aiblins got the richt soo by the lug this time. Pickletillie is in danger o' losin' its proud pre-eminence."

" Can naething be dune, Matthew ? "

Peterkin removed a Dutch cheese and a ham to right and left and leaned thoughtfully over the counter.

" Ay," he said at length, " there's ane or twa things that could be dune. But, man, I'm feared there's nae time."

Two days later the postman as he handed in Peterkin's morning letters remarked expressively, " There is time, Matthew. The census is putten aff owin' to the strike."

" Whew ! Providence is workin' for us, John ! " exclaimed Peterkin piously.

They then discussed certain plans, and two months later, as the postponed census drew near, his wife, at Peterkin's urgent request, wrote to her sister in Glasgow asking her and the bairns to come and spend a long-promised week-end at Pickletillie. " The country is looking lovely just now," wrote Lizzie, " and we would like to have you on Friday—that'll be the seventeenth of June."

On Monday a reply came returning grateful thanks for the kind invitation, and intimating that the lady and four children would arrive on Friday afternoon.

" That's five ! " said Peterkin to the postman.

On the Monday before the census Miss Phemie M'Tavish, Pickletillie's more than middle-aged spinster, entered the shop with a list of groceries of which she stood in need.

" I'm having visitors," she explained, " this week-

end—my friends the three Misses Macfarlane, from Craigport. It's so nice at Pickletillie at this time of the year."

"So it is," agreed Peterkin heartily, "wi' a' the summer flooers—maist refreshin'."

To himself he said as he wrote down the tea, sugar, butter, and cheese Miss M'Tavish wanted, "Ha, ha! the three Misses Macfarlane is gettin' gey auld i' the horn; they dinna want the Craigport census man to ken their ages. Hooever, that's anither three for hiz. Five an' three's eicht."

A little later Muckersie, the farmer of Laighriggs, dropped in to see about some groceries.

"New tatties, Matthew," he observed, "frae the Channel Islands, say ye? Hoots, man, my ain earlies is comin' on grand. It's gaun to be a fine spec. that an' a credit to the pairish when I get them up to Covent Gairden. I'll need to get a dizzen Irish wifies to lift them, though. They're ower at St Mertouns the noo, and I'm getting them next."

"Could ye get them afore Seturday?" asked Peterkin eagerly.

"Ay. Hoo?" asked the farmer, taking a pinch of snuff and handing over the box.

When Peterkin had done sneezing he leant over the counter and whispered in the farmer's ear.

"Ye're a great sport, Matthew," said Laighriggs, laughing heartily. "I'll dae't, man. I'll see aboot it this very day."

"Keep a calm sough aboot it, though," urged Peterkin. "Thae birkies at Balneuchar is quite auld-farrant enough to gang the same gate if they kent. They're boastin' an' braggin' maist awfu'. I'm tellt

they're even bettin' aboot the result, the graceless ne'er-do-weels."

When the farmer had gone—to St Mertouns—he counted up, "Twelve and three's fifteen and five's twenty."

Not long after that Malcolm the postman came in beaming.

"The postmistress is a brick," he announced. "She's got the travellin' repair staff, wi' their tent and their apparawtus, to come on Seturday for a few days—six o' them, at least—to dae work urgently requirin' to be done to His Majesty's telegraphic plant," and he winked first with the one eye, then with the other.

"Twenty-six!" exclaimed Peterkin, then told him about the Irish potato-lifters.

"Grand! Then my gude-brither and his wife and the bairn's comin' on Seturday to stay."

"Twenty-nine!"

On Saturday evening urgent business connected with a consignment of fresh butter he required immediately took Mr Peterkin to the farm of The Beild, about a mile and a half from the village. The business satisfactorily accomplished, the good man was walking homewards, enjoying the beauty of a fine June evening, with the birds singing merrily and all nature rejoicing in its beauty and fruitfulness, when on turning a corner he saw in front of him a gipsy cavalcade. There were three vans, each drawn by a gaunt horse, some men, and a tail of women and children.

"The cairds on their summer migration. They come as regular as the swallows," remarked Peterkin, as he recognised a wandering tribe that visited the neighbourhood regularly every year.

" Weel, Donald," he cried to the leader of the band, " where are ye stravaigin' to the nicht ? "

" We're gaun to Balneuchar," replied the gipsy.

" Balneuchar ! Never a fear ! Ye'll just stay in Pickletillie—a far nicer, kindlier place. Ye ken the bit field doon by the burn ; jist you turn in the by road, and we'll hae some odds and ends o' breid and cheese to gie ye."

" All right, guv'nor—quite the same to us," replied the gipsy, and as they turned down to the burn Peterkin counted them one by one.

" Fifteen—an' twenty-nine's forty-fower ! "

They were very busy at Peterkin's that Saturday evening, and it was after eleven till he finally closed the door and put on the shutters. Standing at the corner of the village street and the road leading northwards, the shop looked along the highway that brought you to Balneuchar. It was a meeting-place of cross-roads, and the vantage point of the village—nay, of the parish.

Peterkin stepped into the road to enjoy the freshness and sweetness of that fine June evening after his day of strenuous, if profitable toil behind the counter. The night was very still. Peterkin heard the whirr of a distant motor cycle, the bark of a wakeful dog up at The Beild, and the call of a night bird in the laird's policies. Then his ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps.

Some one came from the direction of Balneuchar. As he drew nearer Peterkin recognised Dr Auld.

" Ah, good evening, Peterkin ! " cried the doctor. " Yes, I'm late on the road. No unusual thing for me, though. Had a busy evening at Greig, the roadman's. Twins ! "

"Great Scot!" Peterkin clapped his hand to his head.

"Why, man—what's the matter?"

"Stop a wee, doctor. Greig, the roadman, said ye? Doon by the burnside—ay—hurray! It's a' richt; he's in oor pairish. Forty-six!"

"What on earth——"

"Oh—eh—er—never mind. Beautiful evenin' for the time o' year. I maun railly gang in. Gude nicht, doctor," and he hurried guiltily indoors.

"Peterkin's a strictly sober man," mused the doctor as he walked down the village street to his house. "Elder of the kirk and all that. Can it be a case of aphasia—mind-wandering—mental alienation? Must keep an eye on Peterkin."

Next Friday evening John Malcolm burst into Peterkin's waving a copy of the *St Mertouns Gazette.*

"Listen to this!" he cried, and several customers listened eagerly as well as the master of the shop.

"'The parishes of Pickletillie and Balneuchar are the first to send in their census returns, and we are glad to notice that Pickletillie has progressed greatly in population since last census. The figures are:—

"'PICKLETILLIE, . . . 430
"'BALNEUCHAR, . . . 393.'"

"Be thankit!" cried Peterkin. But somehow he did not look up as he said it.

"Hurray for oor pairish!" shouted a boy, and soon the news was all over the parish, and Balneuchar parish as well, where it caused great disappointment, and more envying and grieving at the prosperity of Pickletillie.

## XIX

## TAMMAS TODD, THATCHER

### AND HOW HE SOUGHT A WIFE

"Ay, the thatcher's trade is the auldest of ony—man, it's mentioned i' the Bible four thousand years ago," remarked Tammas Todd, the thatcher, from the top of a ladder leaning against the roof of Nancy Walker's cottage, in the main street of Pickletillie, to Peter Mitchell, the slater, chimney sweep, carpet beater, and jobbing gardener, who stood below.

"It's the naiteral coverin' for a hoose," went on Mr Todd, flourishing the long-handled knife which he used in his trade. "Reeds frae the river or strae frae the field—what better?"

"Plenty better," rejoined the slater briskly. "For ae thing, yer thatch doesna last long, it lets in the wet, and it's dangerous for fire. The Insurance Companies clap a double premium on a thatched hoose."

"They dae that," admitted the thatcher, "but it's clean redeec'lous. Did ye ever hear o' a thatched hoose gangin' on fire—eh?"

"Oh, ay," replied the slater, nodding vigorously to relieve a pain in the neck due to looking up at this exponent of a rival art on the house roof. "Often. A spark frae a lum, an' your thatch is in a bleeze. Ye canna deny it, Tammas."

" But I can, an' dae," retorted Mr Todd heatedly, " an' I ask ye, Peter, to gie me statistics o' the thatched hooses that gaed on fire last year."

Peter waved his hand as though that were quite beside the question.

" There's naething so safe as guid Easdale slates," he maintained, " nor sae bonnie. What could be finer nor a blue-slated roof—especially after a shooer o' rain when it glitters i' the sun like di'monds. But naething will ever mak' your straw roof look bonnie. And," he added, " what a mess ye mak' wi' yer clippin's o' reeds frae end to end o' the street."

Mr Todd gave an exclamation which no doubt meant that there was no use arguing with such imbecility any longer, and turned to his work, cutting a handful of reeds in two with a vicious stroke of his knife.

" A-weel," said the slater, " I'll hae to gang and get on wi' my wark. I'm no' like you, Tammas—I've nae spare time—I dinna ken what to turn to first." This he said considering that the thatcher got very few jobs nowadays. Nancy's cottage belonged to the laird, who had a fancy for the old-fashioned thatch, and did not mind the expense of maintaining it on his estate. " Wi' sae mony roofs to maintain, an' chimney cans to cement, an' rhones to clean, an'—— "

" See an' nail yer slates on firm, Peter," retorted the thatcher, " an' fasten yer chimney cans weel, for on a windy day it's wonderfu' hoo mony folk gets killed wi' them fleein' aboot. That's a thing a thatched roof'll never dae—it's no' a danger to folks' lives."

The slater passed on very briskly, and Mr Todd turned in a leisurely fashion to his job.

Tammas Todd came from Balconquhar, the next village to Pickletillie—he, in common with all the other inhabitants, pronounced it " Ba'neucher." As he worked, the winds of March blew around him, snell and bracing—not without a hint of the coming spring. The March sunshine broke here and there through a cloud-laden sky.

The thatcher was a tall, red-faced, middle-aged man, with a grey moustache that glistened against the winter-apple glow of his cheeks. A bachelor of many years' standing, Mr Todd had withstood not a few sieges conducted by the fair of " Ba'neucher " and Pickletillie, to say nothing of Craigport, a larger place than either. There were those who said that he was by no means invulnerable, and prophesied that he would be led to the altar yet, but time only could tell. Pursuing an old-world trade for which there was not much demand nowadays, he did everything in a leisurely way, and, lingering over his work, delighted in a crack with passers-by. As these conversations were always conducted from the top of a ladder, Tammas Todd had acquired a peculiar " distant " tone of voice, somewhat like that of a ventriloquist. His statements, also, were delivered with much emphasis as was natural to a man speaking from a height. His last job had been the thatching of a shepherd's cottage away among the hills, where he saw nobody from morning till night. Now he was making up for lost opportunities in the comparatively well-frequented main street of Pickletillie.

After a little, Malcolm, the postman, passed by.

" Ah-ha, Posty ! " cried the thatcher cheerfully.

" There ye gang wi' yer budget o' communications guid an' bad. Ye'll no' hae ane for me nae ? "

" Na—ye'll get yer letters at yer ain place o' domicile, Tammas ; we've ower much adae wi' the correspondence o' Pickletillie to trouble oor heids aboot places like Ba'neucher," and the postman laughed the laugh contemptuous.

" Hoots—ye're no' overworked, I'm sure, in a wee place like this," rejoined the thatcher.

" I've to cycle to the ends o' the pairish when I've gotten the letters gien oot roond aboot the doors," explained the postman, " an' my job maun be dune day by day—no like yours that may linger on for months."

" Ye seem to be awfu' keen on wark in Pickletillie," rejoined Mr Todd. " You're the second man that's rubbed it into me the day ; ye'll a' be makin' siller nae ? "

" We're daein' fine—Pickletillie's a grand place for a' the comforts o' life. Ye should mairry an' settle doon here, Tammas, an' enjoy yersel'," and the postman moved smartly on, leaving the thatcher somewhat thoughtful, for he had indeed had in his mind lately the notion of marrying at last, and his ideas on that subject were not without reference to Nancy Walker, on whose very cottage roof he was working at the moment.

Nancy was a tidy widow of fifty, whose husband, a man much older than herself, had been a dealer in pigs, and was believed to have made money in that branch of business. Tammas would have liked some trustworthy evidence on the point. Nancy seemed to live comfortably, taking in washing and sewing, and doing any odd jobs, but—was there a fat stock-

ing-foot or a bank book with a satisfactory balance somewhere ?

Nancy ought to have been well off, the country folk said ; it was tantalising not to know for certain. Worldly gear apart, she would make a capital wife, and as the thatcher had lately felt that the time had come for him to " hang up his hat " somewhere—why not here ?

The next leisurely passer-by chanced to be Mr Peterkin.

" Weel, there ye are improvin' our upper storeys, Tammas," cried the grocer genially. " Ye're an' aspirin' cratur, aye climbin' as near heaven as ye can get, while mendin' the tops o' oor earthly tabernacles."

" Ay, Mr Peterkin, I wish there was mair folk likit the kindly hamely happin' o' thatch, instead o' thae cauld blue slates lyin' like tombstones on a man's hoose."

" It looks couthie, an' the red tiles is very bonnie, too,' said Peterkin. " But this is an age o' cheapness an' utility, ye ken, Tammas, an' we may be thankfu' it's slates we get to cover oor dwellings, an' no' that ugly corrugated iron."

" It's the darned leemit," declared the thatcher with much disgust ; " no fit for naething better than a hen-hoose or a pig-stye."

" The auld Scotch thackit hoosie has brocht forth great men an' heroes—men that hae carved their names deep on the Temple of Fame, an', departin', left their footprints on the sands o' time," declared Peterkin. " I've been tellt," he went on, with a casual glance at Mr Todd, " that the thatch was a favourite hidie-hole for valuables ; folk wad hide the

stockin'-foot or the weel-filled teapot amang the strae, whiles."

"I've never seen naething o' the kind," returned the thatcher, "though I've heard tell o't, like yersel', Mr Peterkin. But I'm thinkin' they a' ken the meanin' o' interest nooadays, an' their siller gangs to the savin's bank."

"Keep yer een open though when ye're takin' off the old thatch, Tammas," said the grocer, with a chuckle, as he moved away up the street to his shop. "Ye never ken what ye may find, as the fox said when he broke into the hen-hoose."

The next interruption to Tammas's work was a very pleasant one. It was caused by that excellent widow woman, Nancy Walker, coming to her door and calling up to him that dinner was ready.

Gladly did Mr Todd come down his ladder. The snell March air made a man hungry, and Nancy was known to be a good cook, and quite lavish where food was concerned.

As he entered, she called his attention to a basin of warm water, a slab of soap, and a towel on the kitchen window. The meaning was unmistakable. Tammas washed his hands.

Then he looked round him, and fairly blinked.

Everything within the kitchen gleamed, or shone, or sparkled. The floor was like snow. The most powerful microscope would not have revealed a speck of dust anywhere. The brass candlesticks better resembled pure gold than any sovereign that ever was minted. It seemed to Tammas that the whole place was scrubbed and polished and burnished to death.

"What a cauld day for you to be up on the roof workin' so hard," remarked the widow sympathetically. "Come awa' in to the fire, Tammas."

He shuddered. Was this the process known as being taken in and done for?

But the widow looked really pretty and remarkably young. She would have passed for thirty-five any day. "Far ower young for me," sighed Tammas in his heart.

Yet the shining little kitchen was extremely comfortable. He sank into a delightful basket-chair, and extended his cold feet to the blaze.

"I'll just draw the table up to the fire, and we'll hae oor denner," Nancy went on. "It's broth an' beef an' tatties an' a rice puddin', and I hope ye'll find it a' quite nice."

"It's far owre kind o' ye, Mrs Walker—er—Nancy," said Tammas Todd. "It's no' every place I gang I get my denner, I can tell ye. Leesbeth askit me—was I comin' hame the day?—and I said no, for I wad be sure to find bite an' sup somewhere in Pickletillie."

"An' hoo is Leesbeth?" asked Nancy, ladling out two platefuls of broth.

"Quite weel—grand—er—she's got roomatiz noo an' then, but otherwise grand."

Leesbeth was Tammas's sister, who kept house for him, and as to whom it is enough to say that you could scarcely be half an hour in Ba'neucher without getting her character.

Nancy nodded; she, too, had heard of Leesbeth.

"I'm glad to say I've never had the roomatiz," observed she, as they supped their broth, which was delicious—the cabbage, turnips, and carrots all nicely

chopped and melting in your mouth like butter. "I've had guid health a' my life, thank the Lord, an' never was better nor I am the noo."

"It's a great blessin'," remarked Tammas. "Health is far better than siller—but, of course, ye hae baith, Mrs Walker—er—Nancy."

"No' me," said Nancy. "Some mair broth, Tammas? That's richt. I like folk that can tak' their meat; na—I hae just enough to dae my turn, thanks be. I can work for a' I need, and I've never wanted for a job yet."

"Just that nae," remarked Mr Todd—this was really disappointing, and yet the little place was so snug and well-furnished—the food so excellent and plentiful—surely there must be Something Somewhere!

He went back to his work, well warmed, and feeling exceedingly comfortable in body, if a little perplexed in mind.

That kitchen would be a charmingly cosy place on a winter night. Such a dinner as he had just enjoyed would be a pleasant dream in the forenoon, and a delightful memory for the rest of the day. There was much to be said for the match, stocking-foot or none.

And then the strangest thing happened.

He was working near a little skylight window in the roof. He pulled away a handful of the old thatch nearly black with smoke and dust, and along with it there came an old grey stocking. And, sure enough, there was something in the foot!

At that supreme moment Tammas Todd did not lose his presence of mind. He looked carefully round to see if any windows commanded the spot where he

worked. There was a window in Susan Ramsay's roof that looked this way, and Susan was the most inquisitive and gossip-loving person in the place; still, he would risk it.

Leisurely gathering a quantity of reeds, and making a hedge of them, Tammas untied the string wound round the stocking a little above the ankle, and with hands that did not tremble took out a handful of sovereigns and half-sovereigns—rare sight nowadays! —some silver, and a bank deposit receipt for two hundred pounds!

For some minutes he examined this interesting find with much care, then put the things back in the stocking.

"I've heard that her man dee'd sudden," he reflected. "He hadna had time to tell her aboot this. Just that!—it's a' quite plain—twa hunder pound i' the bank an' a' this gowd! Hurray!"

Suppressing his joy, Tammas stuffed the stocking among the thatch as far as he could get it, and prepared to stop work for the day.

"It's the finger o' Providence," he piously reflected. "Naething could be clearer. I'll dae it the morn, an' the findin' o' the stockin'-foot will be a joyful surprise for her in the afternoon."

So, after another cosy dinner next day, Tammas jauntily ascended his ladder, an engaged man at last. Two hours later he came down with the stocking in his hand.

"Something I found among the thatch, Nancy," he observed casually; "naething of ony consequence, I daresay," and with rare heroism went back to his work on the roof.

In five minutes Nancy appeared at the foot of the ladder with a look of joy on her comely face that did Tammas's heart good. What a fine woman!

"Oh, Tammas—there was a handfu' o' gold and a bank deposit paperie i' the stockin'!"

"Never!" cried the thatcher, rapidly descending the ladder, and putting on an admirably assumed look of astonishment. "What a surprise! Wha wad hae thocht it?"

"And, oh, Tammas—what a godsend this'll be to puir Sandy's bairns——"

"Eh!" he interrupted, feeling suddenly startled and puzzled. "Bairns—what bairns?"

"Sandy's. He had six."

Mr Todd went cold all over.

"Great Cæsar! I—I never kent ye had a family, Nancy!"

She sat down on the bottom rung of the ladder and laughed heartily, much to Mr Todd's indignation.

"He wasna my man—he was my man's brither; he lived here at one time. He was killed on the railway jist after he got a legacy frae an auld auntie, and we could never find oot what became o' his siller. This is it noo—see, there's his name on the deposit receipt."

"I—I thocht it was yer man's name," said Tammas incautiously.

"Na—he was Weelum—this is his brither Sandy. His bairns are in Glasgow noo, and gey ill-aff, an' what a blessin' this siller will be to them!"

"Confoond—ay—it—it will indeed!" groaned poor Mr Todd.

## XX

## TAMMAS TODD, THATCHER

### AND HOW HE GOT A WIFE

"An' wha did ye a' meet the day, Tammas? Od, it's you that's weel aff, gaein' and seein' a' kinds o' folk, be's me tied up here like a dowg in a kennel, an' never stirrin' frae the bit."

"Ye hae the best o't in this cauld weather, Leesbeth, an' you no' that weel," replied Tammas Todd, the thatcher, stretching out his feet to the kitchen fire in his home at Balconquhar.

Leesbeth, his sister, had a flat oval face, with little black eyes, and a small nose, both features lost in surrounding flesh. Good nature was about the last thing her countenance suggested.

Leesbeth's kitchen presented no pleasing spectacle like Nancy Walker's. It was bare, and not very clean. There were no shining brass candlesticks, no rows of blue-patterned plates, no promise of plenty in dresser or cupboard.

Ornament the walls had none, save a coloured print, entitled "The Broad and the Narrow Way," showing those who, enticed by its attractive but deluding aspect, chose the former, heedlessly following its flowery path towards a blazing furnace, while the pilgrims on the latter climbed a rocky road to green bowers of bliss.

Leesbeth was always making a "poor mouth."

Times were continually hard with her. All Tammas's earnings went to keep the house, and his food was always of the plainest. They could afford nothing better, Leesbeth continually told him. No wonder Tammas liked a thatching job in the country, where he was away from home for a while.

"Wha did I meet the day?" he said, as he drew out his pipe and tobacco pouch. "I met Mattie Simpson, John Simpson's dochter, o' Cosycot, for ane —indeed, I walkit hame wi' her. Fine lass, Mattie!"

Leesbeth's heart jumped; the secret was out! She had been sure there was something strange in Tammas's demeanour, when he came in. This explained it.

All her life she had stood between Tammas and Woman. Her great dread was that he would get married, and so take away her means of livelihood.

So for years she had kept the sharpest lookout for that designing female who might one day appear and entangle poor, simple, foolish Tammas, and time and again she had snubbed and driven off likely candidates for his hand and heart. But of all this Tammas was quite unconscious. In his eyes, Leesbeth figured as a devoted sister, cleverly managing his house, making his earnings go far and generally sacrificing herself for him.

"An' Mattie Simpson's a fine lass, is she?" said Leesbeth agreeably, yet with venom in her heart. "No jist a lass though, Tammas. She'll never see fifty again."

"She doesna look mair than thirty-five," returned Tammas indifferently. It was not by any means of Mattie he was thinking! But his indifference alarmed Leesbeth all the more. He was cleverly acting a part!

"She's fell extravagant, Tammas; siller rins through her fingers like water."

"I dinna believe it," said her brother, filling his pipe.

This was really serious.

Suddenly she remembered her familiar part.

"Ow! Ooch!" she groaned, and doubled up.

"Leesbeth!" cried he, starting to his feet. "It's yer rheumatiz again. What a martyr ye are to that nesty pain!"

"Oh my! Ay—it'll be the death o' me yet, Tammas—there's nae cure for't—syne ye'll come whiles and stand owre my tombstane, an' think I wasna that ill to ye, Tammas."

"Hoots!" said her brother uncomfortably. "It'll no' come to that for mony a lang year yet. Sit ye doon by the fire and keep yersel' warm. I'll hae to leave ye by yerself, for I've to gang an' see Mr Simpson aboot some reeds doon by the burn," and he lifted his pipe and prepared to go out.

"Ay—ye'll hae a pleasant evenin' wi' Mattie an' me sittin' groanin' in agony here. Oh, Tammas!"

"I'll be nae langer nor I can help, but it's a guid lang way, and I maun see him the nicht. Keep yersel' as comfortable as ye can, Leesbeth," and he went out, shutting the door gently.

His reflections were none of the pleasantest. He had got engaged to Nancy Walker, of Pickletillie, on the strength of that deposit receipt for two hundred pounds which he had found in the thatch, only to learn that the money belonged to her late brother-in-law. But, disappointing as that was, he felt somehow that he did not want to go back on the bargain. Nancy's little cottage, in which he counted on taking up his abode, was most inviting, and he knew she

would make him a fine, tidy, cheery wife if he was to get married at last.

But there was poor Leesbeth. What was to become of her ?

As soon as he had gone, Leesbeth's hand sought her pocket, and her melancholy face suddenly brightened. Then, forgetting her " rheumatiz," she rose swiftly and locked the door, and making sure that the blind was drawn close, so that no one could see in, she went to a corner of the kitchen, pushed aside the dresser, lifted a loose board of the floor, and drew forth a long grey stocking the contents of which she emptied on the kitchen table.

There were bank notes, treasury notes, sovereigns, half-sovereigns, silver, and copper, in a big, far-spread heap.

Leesbeth sat down and proceeded to count the money by methods that would have made a bank teller shudder.

" Echty-nine pound twel' an' saxpence-ha'penny," she muttered at last, after having wetted her finger a hundred times in turning over the notes and pushing about the coins. " It's never twice the same ; sometimes echty-seeven, an' sometimes ninety-wan. However, this'll mak' it up a wee thingie," and taking a purse from a pocket in her petticoat, she added some treasury notes and silver to the pile ; then she proceeded to gloat over her treasure in true miser fashion.

" Puir simpleton ! " she remarked, referring to the sorely deluded Tammas. " He little kens I've saved a' this aff the housekeepin'. He'll no' get married if I can hender him, but if he does gang an' mak' a fule o' himsel', there's a wee bit nest-egg here for me. I'll

sune hae it up to the hunder, unless—confoond him an' his Mattie Simpson !

" She's efter him like a fox efter a rabbit, and the silly eedit's hankerin' efter her ; it's as plain as the nose on my face "—which was certainly plain enough, what there was of it. " I maun see what I can dae to put a spoke i' that wheel afore I'm a day aulder. There's nae Mattie Simpson comin' here to put me oot on the street, if I can help it ! "

A tap at the door caused her to sweep the money into the stocking, hastily deposit it in its hiding-place, and draw back the dresser. Then screwing up her features into what she believed was an expression denoting intense pain, though it made her face look more comical than ever, she slowly hobbled to the door.

" Oh, my ! Oh, my rheumatiz ! " she groaned. " Wha's there disturbin' folk, an' me in sich agony ! "

" It's jist me, Leesbeth," said a wheezy female voice outside.

Throwing off her pretence of great suffering, Leesbeth quickly opened the door.

" Come awa in, Mirren Fraser ; I'm glad to see ye ; I'm in trouble, an' there's naebody can help me but you."

Mirren Fraser, a short, squat, very fat woman, whose wispy grey hair was coiled up on the top of her head in pyramid fashion like a big onion, shuffled into the kitchen, and sat down beside the fire with a satisfied " pech."

" What's he been daein' noo ? " she asked, understanding, without being told that Leesbeth's need of help arose from some misdoing of the hapless Tammas Todd.

" It's no' what he's been daein' so muckle as what

the fule is gaun to do ! " snapped Leesbeth. " What dae ye think—he's actually trapesin' aboot wi' auld John Simpson's dochter, Mattie ! Huh ! " And she expressed her scorn and disgust in a contemptuous nasal grunt.

" Tchick ! tchick ! "—Mirren's tongue sought the roof of her mouth ; she shut her eyes, and lifted her fat hands. " The very last 'ooman in the world he ocht to mairry—the very last ! "

" Of coorse—that's what I tellt him, but it was nae use ; he's owre far gane in his infatooation. You an' me maun see what we can dae to pit him aff it, Mirren."

Mirren let her hands fall on her ample knees, and opening her eyes, sought the depths of the fire.

" I'm mindin' something aboot the Simpson 'ooman," she said, in her thick tones. " There was a lad she had aince that gaed awa to Glasgow ; I heard a lot o' speakin' aboot it at the time, but naebody kent for certain what was wrang."

" Can we no' find oot, Mirren ? " urged Leesbeth. " Ye maun try—for puir Tammas's sake."

Mirren slowly shook her large head.

" There's but ae 'ooman'll can tell ye a' aboot it, an' that's Susan Ramsay, the shoemaker's wife in Pickletillie. He was some freend o' hers ; he bided wi' her when he was here, and she's sure to ken ; she has a' the clash o' the countryside "—all the ill-natured and scandalous clash, Mirren might have said.

" I'll gang an' see Susan the morn," said Leesbeth, brightening up, for there was a prospect that if this story could be made to assume a substantial—and lurid—form, poor Tammas might be saved, and her life of idleness at his expense would not come to an end. " Noo we'll hae a wee bit supper, oor twa sel's,

Mirren," and from the press she took the remains of a large steak pie and put it in the oven to heat ; she also put some ale into an iron pot on the fire.

" Wull he no' be comin' in ? " asked her guest uneasily—for it was well understood that the master of the house never shared in these feasts.

" Na, he's awa doon to Cosycot, to see John Simpson aboot some reeds, he said, but really to coort Mattie, of coorse—the auld fule ! He'll no' be back for an 'oor yet."

Then the two ate a hearty supper, washed down with hot spiced ale, and Mirren, after again expressing her sympathy with Leesbeth, waddled away, well before the time Tammas might be expected to return.

When he came in, Leesbeth was still groaning by the fireside ; all traces of the little supper had, of course, disappeared, though there was a certain pleasant fragrance in the close air that might have enlightened him had he been in an observant mood.

" Are ye still no' weel, Leesbeth ? " asked her brother anxiously.

A groan was the only answer. He sat down opposite her, and after a little the sufferer revived sufficiently to say—

" Ye'll get a bittie breid an' some cheese for yer supper i' the press, Tammas ; it's a' we can afford i' thae times ; an' for drink, ye'll hae to be content wi' plain water ; the prices o' things is fair extryordinar', an' gettin' waur every week."

" I'm tellt that Matthew Peterkin o' Pickletillie's prices is less than the shops here," remarked Tammas Todd. " He's sellin' eggs at three shillin's the dizzen the noo."

Leesbeth pricked up her ears. Here was a ready-made excuse for going to Pickletillie to see Susan Ramsay.

" An' they're four shillin's here, an' no' very fresh at that. I'll tak a walk owre to Pickletillie the morn —if I'm able, that is—an' get some, an' syne ye'll hae an egg to yer tea, Tammas."

" Ye're far owre guid to me, Leesbeth," said her brother, as he got out a dry heel of a loaf and a hard hunk of cheese.

Leesbeth looked at him suspiciously. He was in an unusually quiet, subdued, even chastened mood to-night ; it must be due to the glamour which " that hizzie o' Simpson's " had cast upon him.

" But are ye no' gaun to tak nae supper yersel', Leesbeth ? "

She held up her hands, and screwed up her face till every feature disappeared.

" Me, Tammas ? I wonder at ye ! But what does a big strong man like you ken aboot the ways o' puir invaleeds ! "

And Tammas immediately felt himself to be a heartless, unfeeling monster.

Next morning he set off for his job at Pickletillie, " withoot a word in his heid," which made Leesbeth more alarmed than ever. In the afternoon she herself took the road and tramped the five miles to Pickletillie at a brisk pace, resolved to see Susan Ramsay and get from her some information so damaging to " that Simpson woman " that, when hurled at Tammas, with due force, and, of course, embellished a little, it would summarily drive all that nonsense out of his head.

Poor Leesbeth ! Little knew she where the real danger lay. We are all apt to mistake our enemies, just like the birds which flee the approach of a human intruder who means them no harm, but suffer the deadly prowling cat to approach without fear.

It was a chilly spring day, with a sharp east wind, but Leesbeth was warmly clad in a black Astrachan jacket which Tammas had given her on her last birthday. She rather enjoyed the little outing.

At Mr Peterkin's, after many inquiries as to their freshness, she purchased a dozen eggs at three shillings —Mirren Fraser would take half a dozen from her at two shillings. She also bought some excellent ham at twopence a pound cheaper than the Balconquhar price, and a few other things temptingly displayed on Peterkin's counter.

"Yer prices is gey moderate," she graciously observed to the proprietor of the village grocery.

"We buy in bulk, ma'am," explained Peterkin genially. "Our prices bein' moderate, we have a large turnover, an' so can purchase big quantities. Look at this syrup wi' the bonnie picture o' Cleopatrick's Needle on the tin ; I bocht a thoosand tins, an' they're goin' like winkin'. Ye see, we're no' like some o' the traders—we gie our customers the benefit o' a guid purchase."

"In Ba'neuchar, where I come frae——"

"Oh, Ba'neuchar!" interrupted Peterkin, with a gesture of contempt—for between Pickletillie and the neighbouring village there was an ancient feud, and Mr Peterkin uttered the word just in the way that the Jew used to say "Samaritan!" "What can ye expect frae Ba'neucher?"

With laden basket, Leesbeth went down the street towards Susan Ramsay's abode.

There was Tammas's ladder leaning against the cottage he was in process of thatching, but Tammas was not standing on it, or sitting on the roof. Perhaps he had finished for the night.

Dusk was falling ; a light streamed from the cottage window.

All unconscious of approaching disaster, Leesbeth drew near. The blind was not close at the side, and Leesbeth was the very woman to succumb to the temptation to peep in.

Leesbeth peeped in.

They say that listeners never hear any good of themselves. Perchance, those who look in where they have no business to, never see anything that does them good, either.

Before the bright fire was a large, comfortable arm-chair, and in the chair sat Tammas and Nancy Walker, with their arms round each other !

Leesbeth gasped, held her breath, rubbed her eyes, looked away, and looked into the kitchen again. No —it was no horrible vision, but a sad, sober, undeniable reality.

Tammas was hooked at last !

. . . . . .

Leesbeth attended the wedding, two months later, bearing herself with remarkable fortitude and cheerfulness. Public opinion in Balconquhar—led by Mirren Fraser—declared that her conduct showed Christian forbearance, forgiveness, and charity in the highest degree. Tammas Todd was, of course, a monster of ingratitude, and as for that Walker woman——!

Upheld, no doubt, by the Christian motives above-mentioned—but also by thoughts of that stocking under the kitchen floor—Leesbeth bears up extremely well. Tammas Todd, the thatcher, is now an ornament of Pickletillie, and has entered into partnership with Peter Mitchell, the slater.

## XXI

## PLAY-ACTING AT PICKLETILLIE

GREAT DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE

The Travelling Thespians

present

Grand Guignol Up-to-Date

in the Coach House

PICKLETILLIE INN

SONGS, DANCES, and INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Such, with particulars of hour of performance and prices of admission, was the bill that in red letters on a white ground made a sensation throughout the whole parish one Saturday morning.

The bill appeared in all sorts of places. It caught the eye of enthusiastic youth at the school door; it gleamed on a board at Andrew Thomson's smiddy; it flashed forth from gates, walls, and trees. If any-

body didn't know about the great dramatic treat on Friday evening it was no fault of the Travelling Thespians' advance agent.

The Thespians were half a dozen clever young ladies and gentlemen of the theatrical profession, who, finding business dull in the cities, had undertaken a tour of the country districts in a motor caravan. Capital actors, singers, and dancers each one of them, they had been on the road for months, playing in small towns and villages, brightening many a dull evening, and reaping a satisfactory reward for their enterprise. In many a quiet village memories of their visit lingered, and their merry songs and pretty dances and mock-tragic plays made material for talk for months.

Now they had come to Pickletillie to show the inhabitants of that parish what was being done in those London theatres that flourish under the many-coloured electric signs of Piccadilly Circus and the Strand.

The bill was stuck up on a tree at the foot of the road leading to Hillend Farm, and Tam Jackson, the grieve, and Peter Mackay, the second ploughman, saw it as they rode on their horses down to the field where they had left their ploughs sticking in the furrow last night.

On that dim, frosty January morning white rime lay on the grass, and almost blotted out the red letters on the bill.

"What's this o't, Pete?" said the grieve. "Can ye read what it says?"

Peter stood up on his horse's back, an accomplishment of which he was very proud, and flicked away the frost from the bill's face.

" It's gaun to be play-actin'," he announced, " and the name o' the play's the Grand—Grand Geegle."

" It'll be something funny, then," opined the grieve. " Something to gie ye a guid hearty laugh—like Hairry Lauder."

" Like eneuch. The actors is ca'ed the Traivellin'—Sherp-yins, I think it is."

" They'll be smart, clever folk, ye see. Oo'll hae to gang, Pete. I was never at a play-actin' in my life, though I've aften heard aboot players bein' Hamlet an' Macbeth an' King Richard the Third."

" I've never seen onything o' the kind aether," said Pete. " There'll no' be ony herm in't, will there ? "

" There's them that doesna approve o' play-actin'," admitted the grieve, " an' theyater-gaun, but this is no a theyater—it's jist Mrs Anderson's coach-hoose."

" That mak's a difference," said the ploughman hopefully. " I wadna wonder but the minister himsel' will be there."

When on Friday forenoon the large grey motor caravan with " The Travelling Thespians Dramatic Company " painted on it passed up Pickletillie main street, the villagers gazed at it fascinated. Here was a bit of the world's gay frivolity come to their very doors. So these were actually those dreadful people —actors and actresses ! Why, they were just like any other body, but very smartly dressed and happy-looking.

A broad, red-faced woman, waddling into Mr Peterkin's shop with a big market basket on her arm, pointed a disdainful thumb over her shoulder.

" Heh ! So thae's the play-actin' rubbitch ! What a set ! "

"Oh, Mrs Ramsay," said Peterkin, who had been gazing with interest like the rest, "they look to me to be dacent enough young folk, an' rael weel putten on."

"Them that earns the wages o' sin," returned Susan Ramsay virtuously, "is usually grand dressed. Ye'll no' be gaun to see them, Matthew, of coorse."

Mrs Ramsay, being the wife of the kirk precentor—who, poor man, however loudly he might sing in the "box," was made to "sing sma'" at home—thought it necessary to be very circumspect in her own conduct and censorious of every other body's.

"I am that," replied Peterkin promptly, "an', what's mair, I'm takin' the wife and Lizzie."

Mrs Ramsay clicked with her tongue, and held up two large red hands in horror.

"I'm clean flabbergasted at you, the rulin' elder o' the Pairish Kirk, countenancin' thae awgents o' Sawtan, an' showin' sic a godless example to the haill community," she protested.

"Toots, ma'am," said the excellent man. "Whaur's the herm? Thae young folk's jist as guid as you an' me, an' even gin they werena, what ill could they dae us in two 'oors' entertainment? D'ye think they'll be spreadin' microbes o' wickedness a' around? An' I've nae doot their singin' an' dancin' an' actin' will be rale bonnie an' amusin'."

"Awgents o' Sawtan," repeated the uncompromising Mrs Ramsay. "Believe you me, it's no for naething they hae a place in the theyater ca'ed the pit."

"Every ane to his ain opeenion," said Peterkin cheerfully, "this bein' a free country. Noo jist look at thae grand Finnan haddies new in frae Aberdeen

this very forenoon, wi' the fresh, saut smell o' the sea still aboot them. Ye'll hae a bunch, I'se warrant."

There were many other things, it turned out, that Mrs Ramsay wanted, and she departed with her basket full and a pleasant feeling of satisfaction that she had fittingly protested against the backsliding of the elder, and made it clear that she would have neither part nor lot in such wickedness.

"D'ye ken this, Davit?" she exclaimed to her husband when she got in. "Mr Peterkin tells me he's actooally gaun to the play-actin' the nicht. Oor rulin' elder at the theyater! Did ye ever?"

Her (seemingly) meek little husband merely shook his head, remarking that that was beyond a'thing, and went on hammering sprigs into a boot—he was the village shoemaker—with a concentration and energy that might have struck her as suspicious.

In the afternoon the Thespians erected their scenery and arranged their stage properties in Mrs Anderson's coach-house. Horses used to be kept in the stables and carriages in the large annexe, but in these motoring days the place was empty, and it made a convenient hall for gatherings such as this. With lamps hanging here and there, and with red curtains and cushioned seats brought from St Mertouns, the place looked very pretty and snug when the audience began to assemble.

Among the first arrivals were the grieve and the second ploughman from Hillend. They got seats in the very front row, cheerfully paying half a crown each for the privilege, and had they only known how much entertainment they were to get—and to give—

that evening, they would have thought it very cheap at the money.

So there they sat watching everything with wide-open eyes and gaping mouths.

When Mr Peterkin and his wife and daughter came in the place was half-full—a little later it was fairly crammed—and as he passed to his seat his eye fell on no less a person than David Ramsay, the precentor.

"Hullo, David!" he exclaimed, patting that functionary on the shoulder, and feeling him squirm uneasily. "Glad to see ye here for a nicht's diversion. Hae ye brocht the mistress wi' ye, like me?" and Peterkin's eyes twinkled.

"No, I have not," replied the little man nervously. "Fact is," he added in a shamefaced whisper, "she thinks I'm awa' deliverin' a pair o' buits at Mill o' Divot, an' I'll be muckle obleeged if ye'll sae naething aboot seein' me here."

"No' a cheep," said Peterkin heartily, "nor will ony other body, I'll swear. See an' enjoy yersel', David."

A bell tinkled, and the curtain drew up, displaying a pretty drawing-room scene, with a young lady all in white standing with a violin in her hand. The curtain rising gave her the signal to strike up, and she played some of those old Scotch airs so dear to her audience, gliding with much skill from the jauntiness of "Duncan Gray" to the haunting pathos of Auld Robin of the same name. When the thunders of applause (mingled here and there with "That's no' bad at a'") had died away, the company came in dressed as English peasants (stage variety), and to the music of the fiddle they danced a number of pretty

Morris dances, several of them accompanied by quaint old folk-songs. So hearty were the shouts of "ong-coar" that they had to dance them over again. After the curtain fell the violinist played a number of English and Irish airs, standing at the very front of the stage, which was being got ready for the serious performance of the evening, the great Grand Guignol Tragedy, in three spasms, "The Maiden's Ordeal; or, the Ruffians of Rudolpho Castle."

The curtain rose on a weird, gloomy scene suggestive of murder. In the centre towered the frowning ramparts of Rudolpho Castle, with its massive iron-studded door and barred windows, the very home of mystery and tragedy. Behind the castle there rose to the sky the dark, inaccessible mountains of Ahrenratzen—or so the programme called them.

Weird music on the violin, then entered an elderly gentleman, all equipped for travelling, though what he travelled on, except his feet, was not apparent. In low, mournful tones he exclaimed—

"My daughter—my dear and only daughter—for her these bitter tears downflow." Here he searched his pocket for a handkerchief, but not finding one, wiped his eyes with his sleeve. "Since she was stolen from me by my wicked brother, the accursed Baron Thunderstein, 'tis said she is imprisoned in his castle, and I seek to deliver her from the villain who would wed her to his son Oscar, so that our family inheritance may be his. Should he fail to break her to his will he will kill her—my daughter, my little Alice! Ah what a monster of iniquity is the wicked Baron Thunderstein."

Enter from behind the castle a cloaked figure, his

face concealed by a big slouched hat. Mystery and wickedness exuded from every line of his figure. No mistaking him—the bold, bad Baron, of course.

"Ha, my brother Henry! My wretched, white-livered, puling younger brother!" he exclaimed in loud tones, which, however, brother Henry did not hear, so intently was he gazing up at the castle where his daughter was imprisoned. "Now to put him out of my path for ever—now to dispatch him quick. Hist, Otto! My pistols."

"I say, should we no' warn the puir chap?" earnestly whispered Pete to Tam.

"I dinna like. Besides, it wadna be safe," replied Tam, gazing overawed at the sinister figure of the Baron.

At the Baron's call another villain appeared with two huge pistols. The Baron took one, examined it to see that it was duly loaded, grunted as if in appreciation of the weapon's killing powers, and calmly levelled it at his unconscious brother. There was a blinding flash, a deafening report, accompanied by wisps of blue smoke, and a pungent smell of gunpowder, and brother Henry lay dead on the ground.

"Remove him," said the Baron coolly to his henchman. "The inheritance is mine when I have wedded that puling wench, his daughter, to my son. Should she refuse, she shall die." (Curtain.)

"Isna that maist awfu'?" whispered Pete to Tam in horrified tones. "The crool, bloodthirsty, murderin' ruffian."

"I wish I could get my hands roond his neck," exclaimed Tam. "But wait a wee; he'll maybe get his paiks yet."

More weird music, and the curtain rose again on the same gloomy and now blood-stained scene. A young lady and a young gentleman appeared from somewhere behind the castle. She was very pretty and in distress —the murdered man's daughter beyond a doubt.

"Now I have delivered thee from captivity, my own sweet Alice," cried the young gallant. "Long have I loved thee, and gladly would I die in thy service."

"He has every chance if they stand gabblin' there much longer," muttered Pete.

"My dear and faithful Edward, paragon of lovers and prince among men!" exclaimed the girl. "My faithful cavalier, my heart's own true love!"

Then they were locked in each other's arms, and kissed each other fondly, and told each other of their heart's deep, undying devotion.

"Gosh, they ocht to run for't instead o' slaikin' an' smoodgin' there," whispered Pete. "The Baron'll nail them as sure as eggs is eggs."

And sure enough the Baron appeared at that moment, gliding stealthily, followed by the other ruffian, Otto.

"Ha, 'tis the wealthy young Count Edward de Winckleshelle," whispered the Baron. "Good! We shall seize him and hold him to ransom. A hundred thousand crowns he shall pay for his life. Otto, let us be bold and resolute"—though, in truth, master and man could hardly have been better—or worse—in these respects.

The young lovers had not heard all this, though the Baron spoke pretty loud, but they started as though a high voltage electric current had passed through them when he shouted—

"Ha, fellow, what seekst thou here? Wouldst defy me? Fool! Dost not know the power, the iron determination of the Baron Thunderstein?"

"Oh, my cruel uncle!" cried the girl. "Oh, Edward, save me! Save me!"

Count Edward made to draw a revolver, but the Baron was too quick for him. With a mighty blow he felled the hapless youth, then turned to the girl, leaving Otto to tie up her lover with a rope which he had thoughtfully brought with him.

"Now, girl!" cried the Baron. "Wretched fool! Thoughtst thou to escape from me? 'Tis vain! Thy dolt of a lover shall be cast into the deepest dungeon of Castle Rudolpho, and to-morrow, I say"—and he showed his teeth and scowled fearfully—"to-morrow thou shalt wed my son Oscar. I swear it by yonder setting sun that sinks in ruddy splendour in the western sky," and he pointed to a paraffin lamp hanging from the rafters.

"Oh!—my father—help me!"

"Listen, fool! These hands"—and he clenched them before her face—"these hands have just slain thy father."

"Oh!—save me—save me—have mercy. Oh! heaven—mercy—help!"

"Here, I canna stand this nae langer!" cried Pete. "Come on, Tam, and we'll show them there's fair play in Pickletillie," and he sprang upon the stage, closely followed by Tam.

With one blow of his huge fist Pete laid the Baron low, then, to his immense surprise, when his foot came in contact with the castle wall, that grim fortress suddenly collapsed, burying both Count Edward and

the Baron beneath its ruins. The mighty Ahrenratzen mountain range also came crashing down on the heads of the two heroes and completed the general chaos.

For a moment there was stupefied silence, then the lovely maiden they had risked their lives to rescue stuffed a handkerchief into her mouth, subsided on the stage, and laughed and laughed as if she could not stop—as indeed she could not at that moment. As for the Baron and the Count, they lay beneath the castle ruins, and kicked and said strong things, while Pete and Tam dumbfoundedly picked little bits of the mountain range out of their hair and eyes.

One half of the audience followed Alice's example and lay back and laughed ; the other half rose up and cheered. As soon as they could—for laughing—the rest of the company rushed upon the stage, assisted the Baron and the Count to rise, then seized the dazed Tam and Pete and made them bow again and again to the delighted audience. The two heroes had undoubtedly made the hit of the evening. Even the bold, bad Baron, nursing a black and rapidly-swelling eye, cheerfully admitted that.